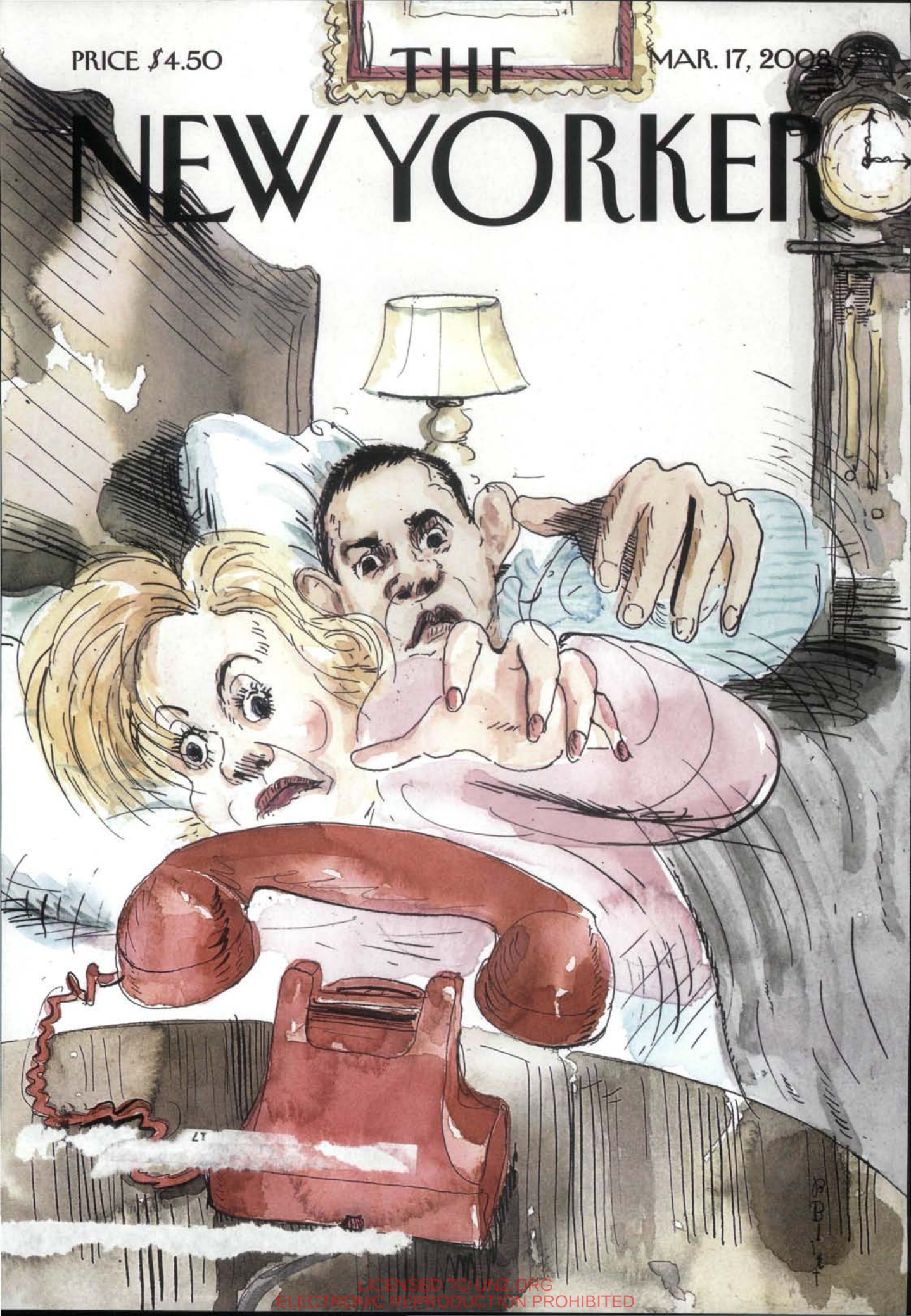


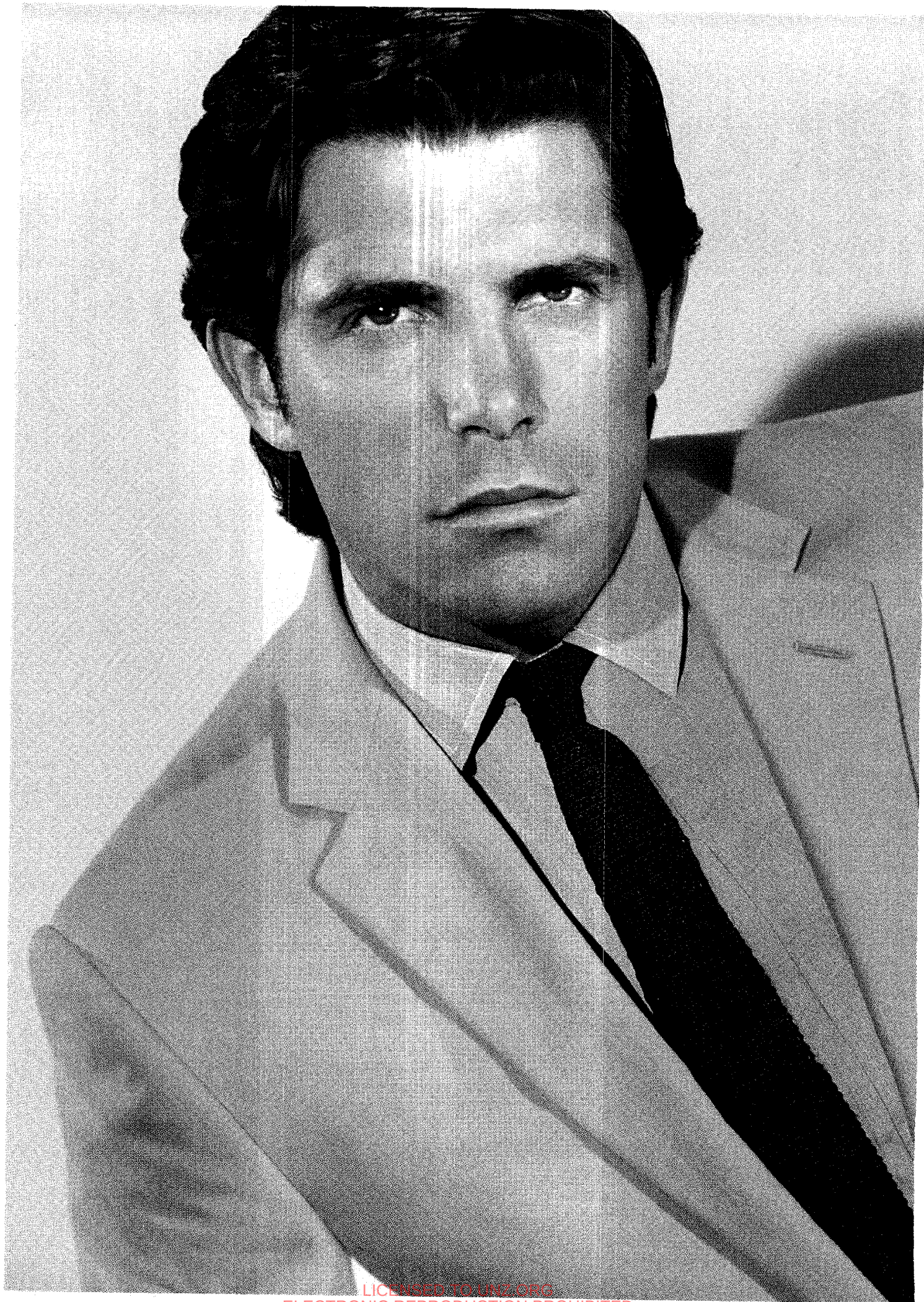
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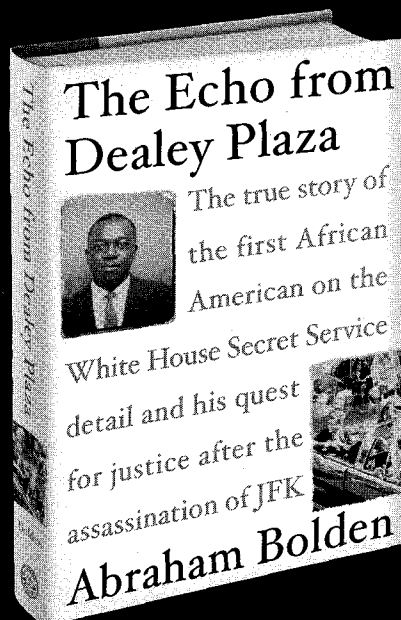


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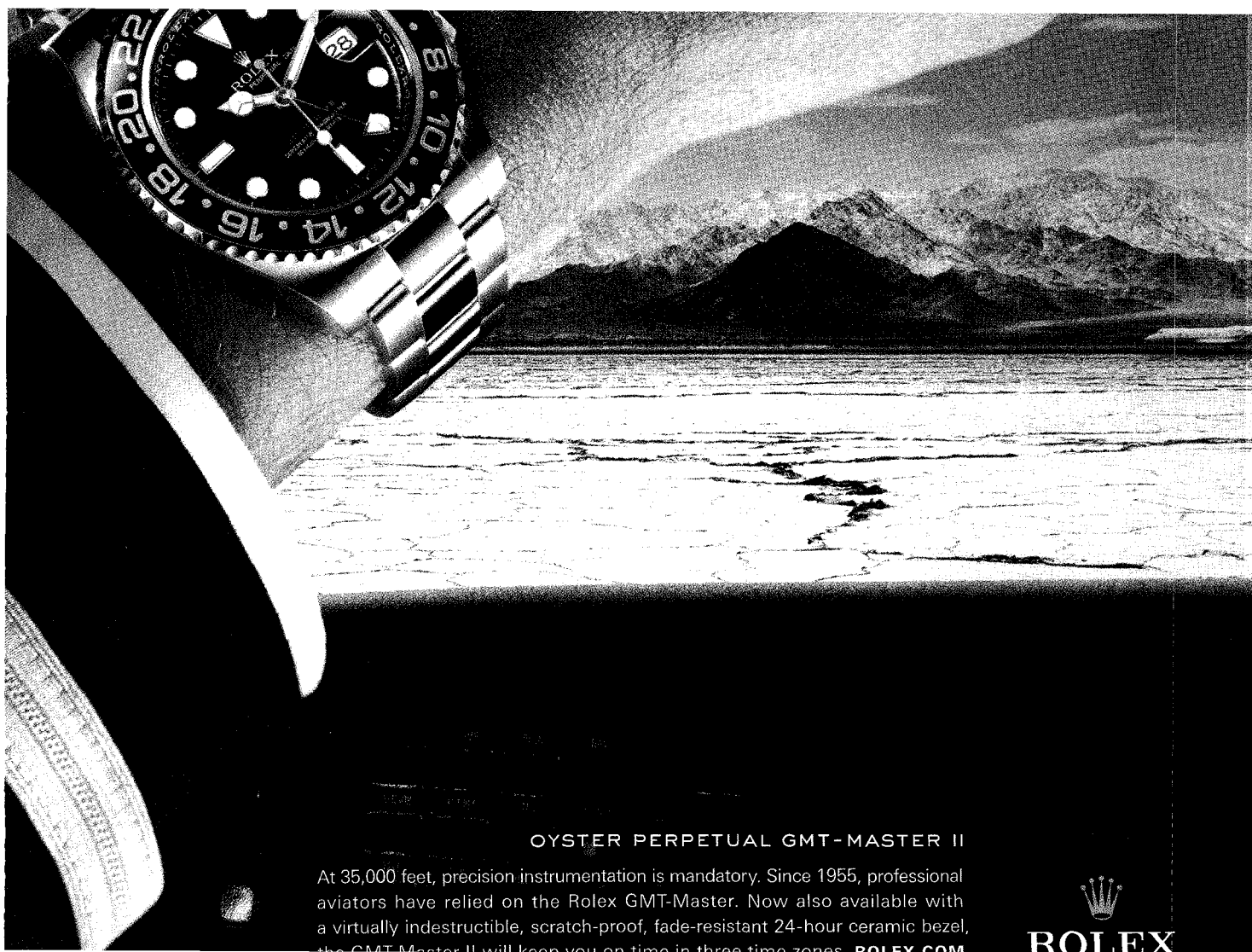
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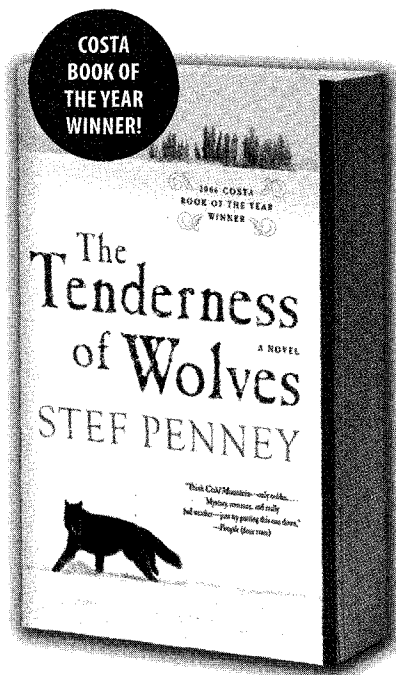
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tale, Conradian thriller."

—*New York magazine*

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CONTRIBUTORS

Ryan Lizza ("The Iron Lady," p. 36) is the Washington correspondent for the magazine.

Alec Wilkinson ("Picturing Auschwitz," p. 48), a longtime contributor to the magazine, is the author of eight books, including "The Happiest Man in the World: An Account of the Life of Poppa Neutrino."

Kennedy Fraser ("Ghost Writer," p. 41) is a writer based in New York and the North of England. She has contributed to *The New Yorker* since 1968.

Paul Slansky (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 46) has written five books, including "Idiots, Hypocrites, Demagogues, and More Idiots," which came out in December.

Fred D'Aguiar (Poem, p. 53) is a poet, novelist, and playwright. His books include "Bloodlines" and "Bethany Bettany."

Barry Blitt (Cover), an artist and illustrator, is working on illustrations for a new children's book, "What's the Weather Inside?"

Peter Schjeldahl (The Art World, p. 86) has a collection of art criticism, entitled "Let's See," coming out in May.

Adam Gopnik ("The Real Work," p. 56) has been writing for the magazine since 1986. His books include "Paris to the Moon" and "Through the Children's Gate: A Home in New York."

Mark Stutzman (Illustration, p. 56) is an illustrator whose work has appeared in several publications, including *Rolling Stone* and *MAD*. He has also designed posters for David Blaine events.

Maureen N. McLane (Poem, p. 64) will publish her first book of poetry, "Same Life," in September.

John Burnside (Fiction, p. 70) is a poet and novelist. His latest novel, "The Devil's Footprints," was published in January.

John Lahr (A Critic at Large, p. 78), the magazine's senior drama critic, is the author of "Honky Tonk Parade: *New Yorker* Profiles of Show People."

Alex Ross (Musical Events, p. 84) won the 2007 National Book Critics Circle Award for Criticism for his book "The Rest Is Noise."

Jill Lepore (On Television, p. 90) is a professor of history at Harvard. Her first novel, written with Jane Kamensky, is due out in the fall.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Hendrik Hertzberg, Ryan Lizza, and Dorothy Wickenden talk about the Presidential race on the Campaign Trail podcast. / Adam Gopnik discusses the art of magic and the craft of writing. / Photographs of Auschwitz from Karl Hoecker's album. / Images from the 2008 Whitney Biennial. / Blogs by George Packer, Sasha Frere-Jones, Dana Goodyear, and the editors of Goings On About Town. / From the archives: Timothy W. Ryback on Auschwitz, Mark Singer on Ricky Jay, and thousands of book and film reviews. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events.



THE MAIL

REMEMBERING A FATHER

We wish that our sister Honor Moore had grappled, in her memoir of our father, Bishop Paul Moore, with the ethical dilemma of "outing" a man whose public legacy is great, whose private life he chose to keep private, and whose personal agony often estranged him from many of us who loved him ("The Bishop's Daughter," March 3rd). Our father succeeded in staying in the closet for several decades; his bisexuality was known within our family for fourteen years before he died, at the age of eighty-three. Some of us dreamed that he would "come out" and finally find peace within himself; we ourselves hoped that if he reconciled his two worlds the emotional wreckage caused by his deception would somehow fall away. Our father chose not to. We may judge him for that; we may wish that our father had revealed his own struggles to help others who are similarly trapped, but that was not his chosen battle. We wonder if a history inclusive of gay men, lesbians, and, yes, bisexuals can only be made and understood by delving into the closely held secrets of those who have come before us, especially those who clung fiercely to the closet. Doesn't it matter, even when someone is dead, that his most fervently held private life, and the unnecessarily explicit details of his marriage, are exposed against his wishes? We believe that it does matter, and that both of our parents' good legacies have been damaged.

*Susanna McKean Moore and
Paul Moore III
Berkeley, Calif.*

*George Mead Moore
Madrid, Spain*

There is no ontological change in human beings when they are ordained to the priesthood. If anything changes in priests at all, it's that too often we begin to deny all our imperfections and brokenness in order to live up to the unattainable stature of the "perfect" priest whom the faithful of the Church would have us be. Bishop Moore changed the landscape of Manhattan and the Episcopal Diocese of New

York forever. His commitment to serving the urban poor and marginalized remains unmatched. If he struggled to be at peace with who he was as a sexual being—and even sinned in the process of sorting that out—I'm hardly surprised. While some will see Moore's vivid portrait of her father as a condemnation, I'll cherish it as a charge to be a more honest priest, and as the prayer of a faithful daughter to a God among whose names is Truth.

*The Reverend Scott Barker
Warwick, N.Y.*

As a social-justice bishop, Paul Moore is a beloved and revered figure in the Episcopal Church. And, as a rector of a progressive parish in the Episcopal Church, I know all too well that Paul Moore's story is not a singular one—among the ranks of either the clergy or the lay membership of the Church. The legacy of grief, anger, and suffering that sexual secrets cause in the institutional Church are legion and legendary. This story illustrates the necessity for our church to struggle honestly with the issue of healthy sexual behavior—gay or straight. The courage of the Right Reverend Gene Robinson, of New Hampshire, and the reverberations from his consecration as a bishop in our church show that we people of God still have a good deal of work to do in this area. More important, secrets—particularly sexual secrets—in the life of an individual and his or her family are deeply harmful to wholeness and to health. It seems to me that the only way for a secret to be healed is to tell it. Communities of faith and society must continue to provide safe spaces for this work to be done.

*The Reverend Martha N. Macgill
Baltimore, Md.*

EDITORS' NOTE: For more letters responding to "The Bishop's Daughter," please visit newyorker.com.

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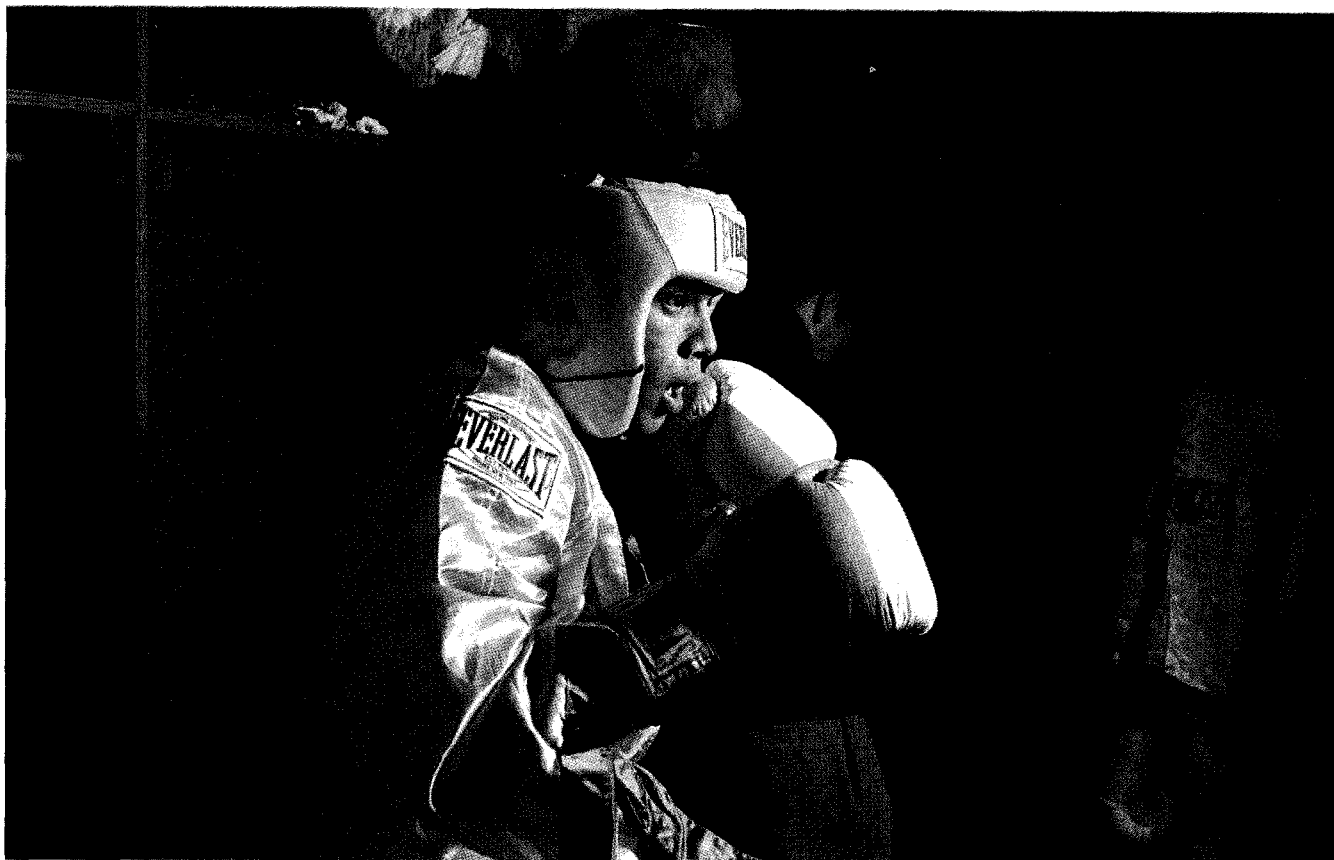
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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE DREAM TEAM

The last time Philip Seymour Hoffman and Stephen Adly Guirgis teamed up was for "Jesus Hopped the A Train." Now, at the Public, Hoffman directs Guirgis's new drama, "The Little Flower of East Orange," starring Ellen Burstyn. (See page 10.)

NIGHT LIFE DEEP BLUE

Koko Taylor grew up on a sharecroppers' farm and went on to become the reigning queen of the blues.

David (Honeyboy) Edwards is a ninety-two-year-old Mississippi native who is one of the last links to genuine Delta blues. Henry Gray served as the piano player for Howlin' Wolf's band. And John Cephas and Phil Wiggins are among the most talented purveyors of Piedmont blues. The World Music Institute brings them all to Town Hall. (See page 13.)

ART POWERS OF TEN

In 1980, Franz Kafka, the Marx Brothers, Golda Meir, and seven other "Jewish geniuses" were the subjects of a print portfolio by Andy

Warhol. The project was such a success that—in a move that met with both praise and skepticism—the artist remade the portraits as paintings, which the Jewish Museum exhibited later that year. The museum revisits the show in "Warhol's Jews: Ten Portraits Reconsidered" (See page 14.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC AMERICAN CENTURY

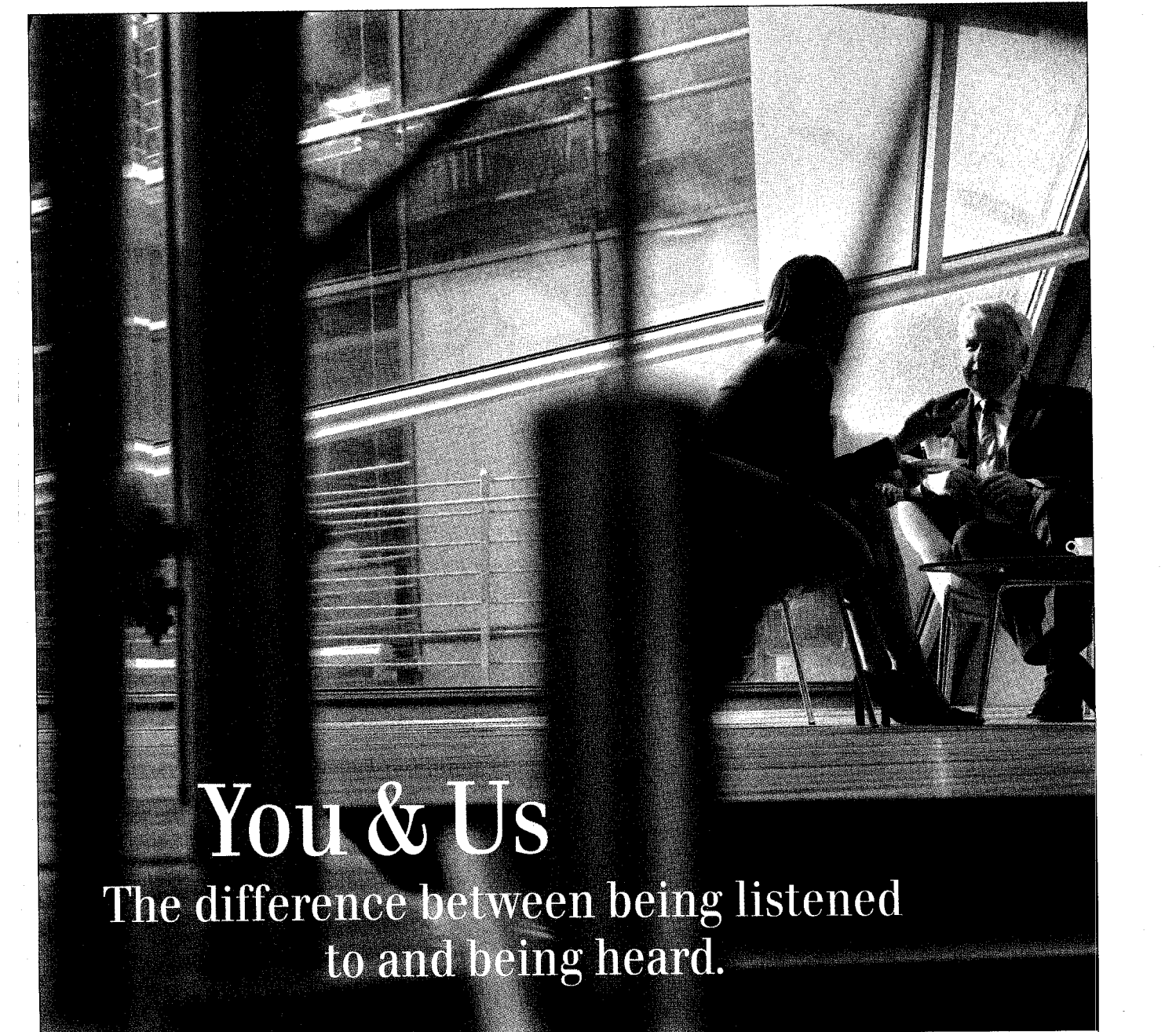
Michael Tilson Thomas has inherited from his mentor Leonard Bernstein a taste for the big symphonic composers of mid-twentieth-century America. His concerts at Carnegie Hall with the San Francisco

Symphony will include pieces by Schuman and Barber (with Gil Shaham and Deborah Voigt as soloists). (See page 18.)

MOVIES WAY DOWN EAST

Kim Ki-young, whose films balance nature and the supernatural, is cited as a key influence by leading South Korean directors. Walter Reade offers a week of his rarely seen work, including his earliest surviving film, "Yangsan Province," from 1955. (See page 24.)

*The 2008 Daily News
Golden Gloves Tournament.
Photograph by Brian Finke.*



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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK EMMY AWARD

In London last December, I met Emma Moss, a young songwriter who performs under the name Emmy the Great. We talked about classic rock ("Zeppelin? Sure: 'Going to California'



is pretty"), and Moss explained that her interest, as both music fan and songwriter, is words. Emmy the Great, who will play the Bowery Ballroom on March 11, has toured with the Mountain Goats, another act that uses its lyrics to drive its songs. Though Moss is calm and clear where the Mountain Goats' John Darnielle is loud and clear, both songwriters find their structure in sentences and build their peaks with language rather than riffs. Emmy the Great's sound roughly approximates that of the British folk revival of the nineteen-sixties, though with more verses. Since she's a woman of words, it is not surprising that her recent single, a breakup song called "Gabriel," is epistolary: "Gabriel," it starts, "this is the last chapter of our correspondence." On the other hand, it's the first chapter of Emmy's career—for the moment, she remains unsigned.

—Sasha Frere-Jones

THE THEATRE OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

THE AMERICAN DREAM / THE SANDBOX
Edward Albee directs two of his one-act plays, from 1959 and 1960. George Bartenieff, Judith Ivey, and Myra Carter star. In previews. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 212-239-6200.)

BOOM

Alex Timbers directs Peter Sinn Nachtrieb's dark comedy, about a girl who answers the personal ad of a reclusive amateur scientist. In previews. (Ars Nova, 511 W. 54th St. 212-868-4444.)

THE BREAK-UP AND THE HAPPY SAD

Two one-act plays by Tommy Smith and Ken Urban, about New Yorkers looking for happiness. Sherri Kronfeld directs. In previews. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

THE CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR

Keen Company presents the world premiere of a drama by Michael Roland Murphy, about Martin Luther King, Jr. In previews. Opens March 18. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

CRY-BABY

A new musical based on the John Waters film, about a rebel who falls in love with a good girl in Baltimore in 1954. Book by Mark O'Donnell and Thomas Meehan; lyrics and music by David Javerbaum and Adam Schlesinger (the bassist for Fountains of Wayne). Mark Brokaw directs; Rob Ashford choreographs. Previews begin March 15. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-1400.)

THE DRUNKEN CITY

The New York premiere of a new play by Adam Bock ("The Thugs"), about three brides to be on a pub crawl. Trip Cullman directs. Previews begin March 13. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

DRUNK ENOUGH TO SAY I LOVE YOU?

Scott Cohen and Samuel West star in Caryl Churchill's new play, about sexual politics. James Macdonald directs. In previews. Opens March 16. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

THE FIFTH COLUMN

The Mint presents the world premiere of this play by Ernest Hemingway, written in 1937, about a spy in Madrid during the Spanish Civil War. Jonathan Bank directs. In previews. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

THE FOUR OF US

Itamar Moses wrote this drama, about best friends who have varying success as writers. Gideon Banner and Michael Esper star; Pam MacKinnon directs. In previews. (City Center, Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

GYPSY

Patti LuPone, Boyd Gaines, and Laura Benanti star in the musical, in a production that originated at City Center's "Encores!" series. Arthur Laurents directs. In previews. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

JACKIE MASON—THE ULTIMATE JEW

Mason brings his one-man political-satire show to New World Stages. Opens March 18. (340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE LITTLE FLOWER OF EAST ORANGE

Ellen Burstyn stars in Stephen Adly Guirgis's drama, set in a Manhattan charity hospital. Philip Seymour Hoffman directs the LAByrinth-Public Theatre co-production. Previews begin March 18. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

MEDEA

La Mama premieres Theodora Skipitares's adaptation of the epic tragedy, featuring Bunraku-style puppets and masks. Previews begin March 13. Opens March 16. (74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710.)

THE POOR ITCH

The "Public Lab" series continues, with this drama by the late John Belluso, about a soldier who has returned home from Iraq without the use of his legs. Lisa Peterson directs. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

ROMEO AND JULIET

Theatre Breaking Through Barriers (formerly known as Theatre by the Blind) transposes the romance to the Upper East Side, performed by a four-person cast. In previews. Opens March 16. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE SEAGULL

Dianne Wiest and Alan Cumming star in the Chekhov play, translated by Paul Schmidt. Viatcheslav Dolgachev directs. In previews. Opens March 13. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

SOMETHING YOU DID

Primary Stages presents a new play by Willy Holtzman, about a sixties radical up for parole thirty years after the accidental killing of an African-American cop. Joanna Gleason stars; Carolyn Cantor directs. Previews begin March 18. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

SOUTH PACIFIC

Bartlett Sher directs the first Broadway revival of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical since it opened, in 1949. Starring Kelli O'Hara and Paulo Szot. In previews. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

ADDING MACHINE

A musical adaptation of Elmer Rice's 1923 Expressionist play. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100.)

BEEBO BRINKER CHRONICLES

An engrossing adaptation, by Kate Moira Ryan and Linda S. Chapman, of Ann Bannon's pulp novels from the fifties and sixties, which follow the loves and longings of pre-Stonewall Greenwich Village lesbians. Beebo (Jenn Colella) is a butch seducer who descends upon Laura (Marin Ireland), a fretful naïf. From there, we follow nearly a decade of romantic entanglements among women. Like some of Bannon's more compromising characters, Leigh Silverman's production plays it straight, neither burdening the plot with the mountains of queer theory that have been devoted to Bannon's novels nor winking too hard at the dated conventions of her writing. Instead, the play pays homage to an author who stretched beyond her genre to depict real lives. (37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-307-4100.)

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF

Debbie Allen directs the Tennessee Williams play. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

CONVERSATIONS IN TUSCULUM

The Public presents a new drama about Julius Caesar, written and directed by Richard Nelson. Aidan Quinn, Brian Dennehy, and David Strathairn star. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

DEAD MAN'S CELL PHONE

The New York premiere of Sarah Ruhl's play. Mary-Louise Parker stars. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

DON JUAN

The experimental troupe the National Theatre of the United States of America has adapted Molière's 1665 satire, inexplicably staging it in the basement of an actual theatre, where the audience sits on low stools in the center of the room and the action takes place all around them, within arm's reach. The result is an odd, cramped, but sincerely enjoyable seventy-minute hyper-farical romp. The ensemble suffers from an array of uneven performances, but even so the earnest sense of fun and the charms of the craftily designed environment are infectious. (Chocolate Factory, 5-49 49th Ave., Long Island City. 212-352-3101.)

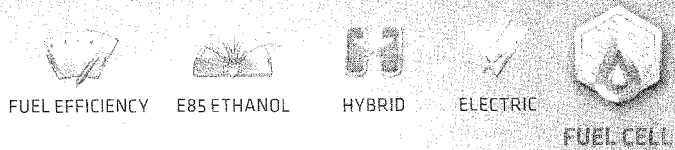
IN THE HEIGHTS

The Off Broadway musical, which depicts a microcosm of the Latino community of Washington Heights, moves to Broadway. With music and lyrics by Lin-Manuel Miranda and a book by Quiara Alegria Hudes. Thomas Kail directs. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200.)

LIBERTY CITY

April Yvette Thompson's solo show, co-written and directed by Jessica Blank. (Reviewed in this issue.) (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200. Through March 16.)

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PARADISE PARK

Charles Mee's season at the Signature Theatre Company concludes with this disjointed vision of American life refracted through an apocalyptic amusement park. Here, a man and a dummy argue over the nature of love, while a tour guide's postulations on morality dissolve into a fruitcake toss. Mee's characters are lost, clinging to nostalgia for a world where the rules were simpler. But one woman's remark that her life has "no direction and no shape" also aptly describes the play, which unfolds like a bleak fever dream laced with whimsy. Mee's psychodrama fares best when they are rooted in some underlying structure; "Paradise Park" has none, and it goes down like too much postmodern cotton candy. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

PARLOUR SONG

Jez Butterworth's new drama follows the faltering marriage of an upper-middle-class British couple—Ned (the poignant Chris Bauer), a demolitions expert, and his wife, Joy (the lovely Emily Mortimer)—and their happy-go-lucky neighbor, Dale (Jonathan Cake), a beefy car-wash proprietor. Ned, who believes that his wife is methodically stealing his possessions, seeks counsel from Dale, as his impassive wife grows more distant. The zippy dialogue, clever staging (well directed by Neil Pepe), and handsome production design are promising at the start. But ultimately the script, while showing Ned's descent into insanity, stops short of offering real psychological depth, save that of the shallow Dale, played with verve by Cake, for whose talents this play seems a grand showcase. (Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

RAPUNZEL

Kneehigh Theatre, from Cornwall, England, brings a feisty, dreadlocked Rapunzel to the New Victory. Written by Annie Siddons; Emma Rice directs. (209 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

SECRETS OF A SOCCER MOM

Kathleen Clark's play about suburban mothers begins with its heroines dancing to Aretha Franklin's "Think" while doing chores; they're all having a blast until a kid offstage screams "Mom!" It's a funny, recognizable moment that also inspires worry about clichés to come; fortunately, Clark aims not to reinforce stereotypes but to explore what lies beneath them. Nancy (Nancy Ringham), Lynn (Deborah Sonnenberg), and Alison (Caralyn Kozlowski) sit on the sidelines between their shifts during an annual mother-and-son soccer game; talk of whether they should let their young sons win leads to a more personal conversation about ambition, loneliness, sex, and sacrifice. By the end, they're hungry for victory, and we're rooting for them. Directed by Judith Ivey. (Snapple Theatre Center, 50th St. at Broadway. 212-307-4100.)

Also Playing

AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY: Imperial, 245 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BETRAYED:** Culture Project, 55 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. **COME BACK, LITTLE SHEBA:** Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. Through March 16. **CRIMES OF THE HEART:** Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. **CURTAINS:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE HOMECOMING:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **LOWER NINTH:** Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101. **MACBETH:** BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. **MAMMA MIA!** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **NOVEMBER:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **PASSING STRANGE:** Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **THE SEAFARER:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE SLUG BEARERS OF KAYROL ISLAND (OR, THE FRIENDS OF DR. RUSHOWER):** Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303. Through March 16. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **XANADU:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—March 13: Adrian Belew has played with everyone from the Talking Heads and David Bowie to Frank Zappa and William Shatner, but the maverick guitarist is best known as the front man of the prog-rock institution King Crimson. He's currently touring under the rubric of the Adrian Belew Power Trio, in which he's joined by a pair of young siblings, Eric and Julie Slick, on drums and bass, respectively. March 17: The local Irish rockers Black 47.

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—March 11: The brash and chiming rock of the *Pigeon Detectives* and the power ballads of *Your Vegas*. With *Emmy the Great*. March 12: The enticing Australian singer-songwriter *Missy Higgins*. March 15-16: The Bell X-1 was the first aircraft to break the

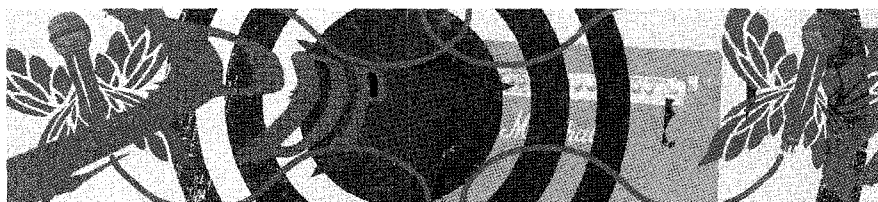
this year. March 18: *Fu Manchu*, from Southern California, traffics in stoner metal, an intensely hard, riff-driven style of rock popular with fans of skating, surfing, and hot rods.

CANAL ROOM

285 West Broadway (212-941-8100)—March 15: A benefit for the Thomas P. Cloherty Family Education Fund. Cloherty, who was born on St. Patrick's Day, was an Eagle Scout, and he went on to become a special agent with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Stationed in Maine, he died of a heart attack while running in Acadia National Park in December of 2005. He was thirty-seven, and he left behind a wife and four young children. His younger brother is in a local band, *Booga Sugar*, and the party-loving dance rockers perform each year in his honor. (For more information, visit www.boogasugar.com.)

CARNEGIE HALL

57th St. at Seventh Ave. (212-247-7800)—March 17: The *Chieftains*. It wouldn't be St. Patrick's Day without a visit from Ireland's musical ambassadors. From their late-fifties work as members of Sean O'Riada's visionary ensemble Ceoltóirí Chualann to the years of collaboration with the likes of Van Morrison, James Galway, and Mick Jagger, these instrumental wizards have been doing for traditional Irish music what Bill Mon-



POP NOTES SIMPLE PLEASURE

After forty years of refining his holy hybrid of American R. & B. and Celtic folk, Van Morrison is taken for granted as a rock-and-roll icon. And while canonization has its advantages, it doesn't serve the living artist. Morrison—who plays at the United Palace on March 15—continues to explore all matters poetic, spiritual, and emotional, and if his albums have become more loose-fitting over time, they never stray far from the same central questions: What produces inspiration for living men? How should we stand in relation to the great art that came before us? How can a man both change and remain the same? What keeps Morrison from seeming churlish—as if he did not hear the answers the first time around—is his musical reach and, most important, his incomparable vocals.

"Keep It Simple" (Lost Highway), his thirty-eighth solo album, opens unpromisingly, with "How Can a Poor Boy?" a plodding blues over which Morrison sings well but not interestingly. What follows is far more rewarding. "School of Hard Knocks" is the most recent (and one of the least bilious) in a long line of songs that target critics, graceless fans, and anyone else who has got be-

tween him and his search for enlightenment. "No wavelength," he sings, "no mileage, no current currency / No answers, just silence, nothing is what it's supposed to be." Elsewhere, there's an agile little love song with philosophical overtones ("That's Entrainment"), a wrenching romantic ballad ("Lover Come Back"), and a loping country-tinged song whose melody recalls the standard "Marie's Wedding" ("Song of Home"). Morrison's recent albums have featured prominent horn and string arrangements; this time around, he's backed mostly by guitar, a surprising amount of which is electric. The songs are compact; only the closer, "Behind the Ritual," breaks the six-minute mark. The over-all mood is welcoming, which isn't to say ingratiating, and temperate, which isn't to say mellow. There's nothing as fiercely mournful as "Linden Arden Stole the Highlights," from "Veedon Fleece," or as triumphantly erotic as "Angeliou," from "Into the Music," true, but those albums didn't have anything as unpretentiously wise as the title track of this one.

—Ben Greenman

sound barrier. Bell X1 is an up-and-coming rock band from Ireland with an arena-ready sound containing echoes of Franz Ferdinand, Coldplay, and Radiohead. It's broken through to the top of the charts at home, and is looking to do so here, too. March 17: The Vines burst out of Sydney, Australia, at the start of the decade with a brash, volatile sound that gave bands like the Strokes and the Hives a run for their neo-garage-rock money. A lackluster sophomore album and the subsequent breakdown of their lead singer, Craig Nicholls (who was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome), briefly stalled the band's momentum, but the Vines have rebounded and reportedly have a new album slated for release later

roe did for the rural American string band—treating it with a respect that lifts it well above any salt-of-the-earth sentimentality.

IZOD CENTER

East Rutherford, N.J. (212-307-7171)—March 13: The Van Halen reunion tour wobbles on, with Eddie Van Halen's son, Wolfgang, continuing to fill in for the original bassist, Michael Anthony. The hairlines and waistbands may have changed, but the band's hooks and high-voltage sound are intact.

RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL

Sixth Ave. at 50th St. (212-247-4777)—March 15-16: *Celtic Woman* puts a polished gloss on traditional Celtic tunes as well as more contem-

JOHN RITTER

porary fare like Enya's "Orinoco Flow" and the theme from "The Lord of the Rings." The group, which was put together by a "Riverdance" veteran and a few Irish entrepreneurs for a PBS television special a few years ago, has been a smashing success.

UNITED PALACE

4140 Broadway, at 175th St. (212-307-7171)—March 15: The Celtic soul man **Van Morrison**.

WEBSTER HALL

125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—March 15: The barroom-seasoned baritone **Joe Hurley** and his fiery rocking band of Hibernians, **Rogue's March**, lead a cast of thousands (to indulge in a bit of blarney) in an early, all-star St. Patrick's Day celebration. March 18: The **Mountain Goats**. John Darnielle, who leads this shifting ensemble, made his reputation, and a flood of albums, out of a staunch devotion to low-fidelity recording, most often on a department-store boom box. His frantic strumming of an acoustic guitar and high-pitched delivery of ultra-literate lyrics endeared him to indie-rock fans. Lately, he's availed himself of recording studios and upped the fidelity of his albums, throwing his songs into high definition. The Goats' new album, "Heretic Pride," is full of sharply drawn characters.

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE

The institute usually presents artists from abroad. This season, it's also been honoring American musicians with its "National Heritage Masters" series, which celebrates the twenty-fifth anniversary of the National Endowment for the Arts' National Heritage Fellowships, this country's most esteemed honor for traditional artists. As a part of the series, it brings **Koko Taylor**, **David (Honeyboy) Edwards**, **Henry Gray**, and **John Cephas and Phil Wiggins** to Town Hall on March 15. (123 W. 43rd St. For more information, call 212-545-7536.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—March 12-15: **Steve Kuhn's** 2007 release, "Live at Birdland," displayed his rapport with the bassist **Ron Carter** and the drummer **Al Foster**, the exceptional rhythm section that the lyrically minded pianist first collaborated with in the mid-eighties. Their unions are infrequent, and they are one of the most outstanding contemporary piano trios around.

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—March 11-16: The pianist and arranger **Kenny Werner**, at the helm of a deft septet that includes the trumpeter **Randy Brecker** and the saxophonist **James Carter**, is joined by the singer **Roseanna Vitro**, for an evening of the blues.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA

Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—March 11-16: **Cyrus Chestnut**, a consistently spirited pianist, is joined by **Carla Cook**, a forthright singer with a similar, audience-embracing style.

"HIGHLIGHTS IN JAZZ"

March 13: The vocalist **Freddy Cole** gets his due in a tribute featuring the saxophonists **David (Fathead) Newman** and **Houston Person**, the trumpeter **Lew Soloff**, and the chanteuse **Cynthia Scott**, along with the honoree himself. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 212-220-1460.)

IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—March 13-16: The groundbreaking jazz and fusion guitarist **Stanley Jordan** celebrates the release of his new album, "State of Nature," his first recording for a mainstream label in more than a decade. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul**. The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER

Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—March 13-15: The premiere of a new composition by **Frank Foster**, linking standards and new material to the theme of romance, is sure to be the highlight of these programs, which also include new

work by two other composers. The vocalists **Denitis Rowland** and **Marlena Shaw** will join **Foster** and the **Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra**.

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—March 12-16: The Brazilian guitarist and singer **Vinicius Cantuária** started his career in the late sixties as a drummer for the Brazilian rock band **O Terço** and went on to write hits for the likes of **Caetano Veloso** and **Gal Costa**. Since the mid-nineties, he has lived in New York, where he has honed his own contemporary take on bossa nova. His latest album, "Cymbals," includes contributions from the pianist **Brad Mehldau**, the guitarist **Marc Ribot**, and the violinist **Jenny Scheinman**. He's joined here by the trumpeter **Michael Leonhart**, the drummer **Adriano Santos**, and the percussionists **Dendé** and **Nanny Assis**.

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—March 11-16: The pianist **Marilyn Crispell**, a frequent collaborator with the new-jazz visionary **Anthony Braxton**, last recorded with the bassist **Mark Helias** and the drummer **Paul Motian** in 2004, when she released the compelling album "Storyteller." The three, who form an intuitive trio, had a triumphant run here last year, which augurs well for this gig. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—"Poussin and Nature: Arcadian Visions." Through May 11. ♦ "Gustave Courbet." Through May 18. ♦ "Jasper Johns: Gray." In the mid-fifties, Johns discovered that painting in a restricted palette of black and white—eliding the "emotional and dramatic" qualities of color—helped him create work that was formally focussed and intellectually rigorous. Johns aficionados will recognize the artist's signature motifs (flags, maps, targets, numbers) and mediums (encaustic, collage). With almost a hundred and twenty works, the show might run the risk of pushing its luck and triggering grayscale fatigue. Instead, it proves how successfully Johns has exploited the range of his palette's seemingly limited possibilities—even more than **Robert Ryman** did in his white paintings. As the work approaches the present, the exhibition feels like it's picking up speed rather than petering out. Through May 4. ♦ "Tara Donovan at the Met." Through April 27. ♦ For "Lee Friedlander: A Ramble in Olmsted Parks," the photographer trekked through Central, Prospect, and Morningside Parks as well as other more far-flung sites, but don't expect a series of magnificent vistas. The master of the obstructed view, Friedlander avoids the picturesque and focusses on the particular: a path, a pond, a bridge, a wild mess of undergrowth. Instead of sweeping landscapes, his panoramas describe (and truncate) individual trees with the careful attention of a portraitist. Friedlander doesn't stand back and contemplate the landscape, he pushes right into it, filling his frame with dense tangles of branches and leaves—untamed nature, not manicured lawns. Through May 11. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—"Color Chart: Reinventing Color, 1950 to Today." Through May 12. ♦ "Design and the Elastic Mind." Through May 12. ♦ "Jan De Cock: Denkmal 11." Through April 14. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

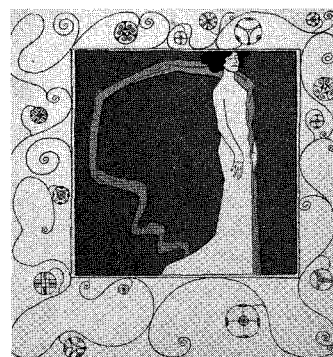
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—"Cai Guo-Qiang: I Want to Believe." Through May 28. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—"2008 Whitney Biennial." Through June 1. ♦ "Chimneys and Towers: Charles Demuth's Late Paintings." Through April 27. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

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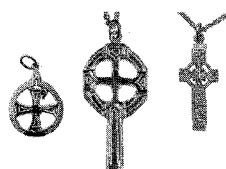
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BROOKLYN MUSEUM

200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—“Ghada Amer: Love Has No End.” Through Oct. 19. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—“Water: H₂O=Life.” Through May 26. ♦ Around five hundred specimens flit through the Butterfly Conservatory, a pocket-size hothouse planted with orchids and other flora. Through May 26. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

ASIA SOCIETY

Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—“Designed for Pleasure: The World of Edo Japan in Prints and Paintings, 1680-1860.” Through May 4. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—“Rococo: The Continuing Curve, 1730-2008.” Through July 6. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION

1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—“Parmigianino's Antea: A Beautiful Artifice.” Through April 27. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY

1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—“The Collections of Barbara Bloom.” Through May 4. ♦ “Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art.” Through May 4. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—“Warhol's Jews: Ten Portraits Reconsidered.” Opens March 16. “From The New Yorker to Shrek: The Art of William Steig.” Through March 16. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—“Michelangelo, Vasari, and Their Contemporaries: Drawings from the Uffizi.” Through April 20. ♦ “Close Encounters: Irving Penn Portraits of Artists and Writers.” Through April 13. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEO DEL BARRIO

Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (212-831-7272)—“Arte ≠ Vida: Actions by Artists of the Americas 1960-2000.” Through May 18. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 5.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—“Under New York Skies: Nocturnes by Yvonne Jacquette” is a major presentation of nocturnal landscapes by an artist who has painted aerial portraits of the big city's bright lights for thirty years. The show includes both pastel studies and large-scale oils. The best are triptychs that splice together segments of glowing highways as seen from planes, or swaths of Times Square's glitz glimpsed from skyscrapers. Jacquette's user-friendliness is a hazard—these images would make a fine calendar—but her technique is impeccable. Through May 4. ♦ “Street Dance: The New York Photographs of Rudy Burckhardt.” The show surveys fifty years of complicated, canny, and utterly charming photographs and films by Burckhardt, who was Yvonne Jacquette's husband. Through April 13. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—The museum inaugurates its new building with “Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century,” an international survey of recent sculpture, collage, and sound- and Internet-based work that examines the antiheroic tendency in contemporary art. Through March 23. ♦ “Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries: Black on White, Gray Ascending.” Through March 23. ♦ “My Barbarian: The

Golden Age.” Through March 20. ♦ “Jeffrey Inaba: Donor Hall.” Through November 9. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

NEUE GALERIE

1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—“Gustav Klimt: The Ronald S. Lauder and Serge Sabarsky Collections.” Through June 30. (Open Thursdays, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER

22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—“WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution.” Through May 31. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

SCULPTURECENTER

44-19 Purves St., Long Island City (718-361-1750)—“Tom Burr: Addict-Love.” Through March 30. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

DIRK BRAECKMAN

The first New York solo exhibition by this mid-career Belgian photographer is full of mature, solid, and deeply depressing pictures from the past fourteen years. Working in grainy black-and-white, Braeckman has created a look so noir that many of his subjects—dismal, empty rooms and the occasional naked young woman on a bed—simply dissolve into the murk. The sun gives no warmth, and flashbulbs add only a sheen of glare; light and life seem to have been drained away, replaced by a dim haze. There are echoes of Daido Moriyama here, but Braeckman's darkness has a weight all its own, and a weird, hypnotic attraction. Through March 22. (Robert Miller, 524 W. 26th St. 212-366-4774.)

DIANA COOPER

Construction paper, colored felt, map pins, Magic Markers, and other craft-aisle commonplaces enjoy an apotheosis in Diana Cooper's ambitious installation. In the front gallery, a hollow, tiered construction lies on its side like a toppled building or an extended telescope. Sheathed in red plastic, it is tiled inside with hectic doodles in red pen. The sense that one could tumble head first into this giant toy is realized in the back room, a walk-in drawing decorated with yellow-and-orange striped stalactites and countless other exactly made gewgaws. Through March 29. (Postmasters, 459 W. 19th St. 212-727-3323.)

AMY CUTLER

Cutler made her name with prints and drawings depicting covens of long-haired women engaged in wildly esoteric, earnestly cooperative tasks, as if in illustration of a proverb or fairy tale. This approach continues as Cutler tries her hand, for the first time, at sculpture. A hundred and twenty figurines (each about six inches high, cast in white Hydrocal with faces hand-painted in gouache) are arranged on and underneath a wooden table. On top, what seem to be the members of a council sit on stools upholstered with their braids; below lie advisers or assistants, each cocooned in a sort of mermaid sweater. All are linked by a network of strings, and a lamp throws their shadows on the walls. Through April 5. (Tonkonow, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-255-8450.)

BILL JENSEN

These forty-nine abstract works on paper were inspired by the countryside around Siena, but their calligraphic brushstrokes suggest the influence of Chinese scroll painting. Most of the pieces are in black-and-white, made with ink and tempera, and have an affecting weight and sombreness; many were painted around the time of the death of Jensen's friend Al Held, to whom the show is dedicated. When Jensen ventures into color, as in nine of the works here, he does so with gusto, using oranges, reds, purples, and greens that vibrate with the brilliance of dry pigments and quicken the elegiac notes. Through March 15. (Danese, 535 W. 24th St. 212-223-2227.)

SARAH PICKERING

This British photographer's terrific new pictures were made in "burn units"—fully furnished rooms rigged to teach forensic teams how to determine the origins of household fires and arsons. Pickering captures the moment when the unit (typically a crummy little bed-sitter as realistic as a stage set) starts to combust and fill with smoke. Although these dramas begin as fictions and are carefully contained, the fires are real and the destruction in such an intimate, seemingly lived-in space is alarming. Yet the photographs are oddly thrilling—vicarious vandalism, guilt-free and artful. Through March 15. (Cooney, 511 W. 25th St. 212-255-8158.)

MICHAEL ROYNER

A monumental chamber made of rough-hewn blocks of stone, Rovner's "Makom II" (*makom* means "place" in Hebrew) has the gravitas of a tomb or temple. In fact, the stones were salvaged from destroyed houses in Israel and Palestine by Rovner and her team of masons. The sixty-ton construction is roofless and pierced by two slits, the larger of which is a vertical gap too narrow to be a doorway. Each tawny block in the structure is tattooed with a Hebrew letter and numbers, as if at an archeological dig. (A video shows Rovner and her crew in Israel, piecing the structure together like a colossal jigsaw puzzle.) On the gravel floor inside, a flat, grooved stone like a hearth or an altar is visible. Through March 15. (PaceWildenstein, 545 W. 22nd St. 212-989-4258.)

SILVIO WOLF

Some of the Italian artist's big color photographs flit with abstraction, and others directly engage it. Two groupings depict curtains and the light that filters through and pierces them, with allusions that range from Brancusi to Wolfgang

Tillmans. As with most of the images, the subject is incidental to Wolf's seductive studies in luminosity, texture, and negative space. Two pictures dispense with subject entirely, reproducing the bands and blushes of color that appear on exposed film leader, but even a photo of three human figures allows them to disappear into a lovely, white-on-white fog, more memory than presence. Through March 15. (Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St. 212-989-7600.)

Short List

MARCEL DZAMA: Zwirner, 519 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through April 19. **KEITH EDMIER:** Petzel, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467. Opens March 14. **BRUCE NAUMAN:** Sperone Westwater, 415 W. 13th St. 212-999-7337. Through March 29. **ADRIAN PIPER:** Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545. Through April 19. **RUTH ROOT:** Kreps, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-741-8849. Through March 15. **"MALE":** White Columns, 320 W. 13th St. 212-924-4212. Through March 30.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

MICHEL GONDRY

Timed to coincide with the opening of his new film, "Be Kind Rewind," Gondry's exhibition (which shares the movie's title) could be seen, from a cynical perspective, as a sly marketing campaign. But it moves beyond promotion by successfully tying the movie's D.I.Y. premise (two video-store clerks remake movies they've accidentally erased) to a winsome installation. Chintzy stock movie sets—police station, doctor's office, campfire in a forest clearing—fill the gallery, and visitors can sign up

in advance to shoot their own films. Mayhem ensues, especially on weekends when the busy gallery feels like a grassroots film school, studio lot, and video store rolled into one. Through March 22. (Deitch, 18 Wooster St. 212-343-7300.)

OHAD MEROMI

Meromi's work, like that of his fellow Israeli artist Guy Ben-Ner, combines low-fi home-movie aesthetics and collaborative production with high-brow references. A two-part video finds actors wandering the dry hills of Israel and the South of France, performing a "learning play" by Bertolt Brecht. An accompanying installation explores ideas of art and communal living via an open, modular, homespun construction. Meromi is so adept at synthesis that what might have appeared to be a shotgun marriage of incompatible modes—Brecht and kibbutz collectivism, Joseph Campbell mythologizing and modernist design—is actually seamless. Through March 15. (Harris Lieberman, 89 Vandam St. 212-206-1290.)

BARBARA T. SMITH

Smith's "Black Paintings" (1965), smart and simple canvases under highly reflective glass, are installed with a section of "Field Piece" (1968-72), illuminating the career of an artist best known for performance. Blades of fibreglass grass, each nearly ten feet high, rise from a low platform. Take off your shoes, step alongside them, and you'll trigger lights in their bases. (Timid visitors can wait for the automatic activation, every fifteen minutes.) Just sixteen of the original hundred and eighty blades are here—augmented by vintage photographs of Smith and friends cavorting in the giant glade—but they're sufficient to convey an artist merging art and body, figure and landscape, viewer and performer. Through March 21. (Maccarone, 630 Greenwich St. 212-431-4977.)

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DANCE

PAUL TAYLOR DANCE COMPANY

In the final week of the Taylor season, his recent Mexican-themed companion pieces, "De Sueños (Of Dreams)" and "De Sueños Que Se Repiten (Of Recurring Dreams)," join highlights of the revolving repertory: the Great Depression-themed "Black Tuesday," the pastoral "Esplanade," a masterpiece from 1975, and "Promethean Fire," one from 2002. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. March 11-13 at 7, March 14 at 8, March 15 at 2 and 8, and March 16 at 3.)

KANSAS CITY BALLET

The ensemble is making its Joyce début, to celebrate its fiftieth season. On the program is a technical tour de force by Twyla Tharp, "Brahms Paganini." William Whitener, one of the dancers who originally performed this work, in 1980, is now the group's artistic director, and his piece "First Position," set to the music of Glazunov, joins "Hey-Hey, Going to Kansas City," a new work by the veteran modern-dance choreographer Donald McKayle, which pays tribute to that city's jazz scene. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 11-12 at 7:30, March 13-15 at 8, and March 16 at 2 and 7:30.)

SHANI NWANDO IKERIOHA COLLINS / JULIANA F. MAY

Collins, known for her spirited explorations of African-American life, presents two works: "Don't Live Here Go," a modern cleansing dance, and "Lullien in a New Plantation Economy," a culture clash that sets Chopin against traditional songs by the Master Musicians of Tanzania. May's "Hydra Cashier" is more abstract, an undulating ensemble piece that plays with time and shapes. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. March 12-15 at 7:30.)

JONAH BOKAER

Bokaer was a Cunningham dancer until last year, and has gone on to become Robert Wilson's house choreographer, but his recent focus has been motion-capture technology. In "The Invention of Minus One," which considers subtraction in many forms (rewinding, repetition, erasure), three dancers (all present or former members of the Cunningham dance company) perform rigorously

structured movement sequences, sharing space with a three-dimensional animated décor based on motion capture. The program also includes a solo performed and created by Bokaer. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101. March 12-16 at 7:30.)

BRIAN BROOKS MOVING COMPANY

To celebrate the tenth anniversary of his company—and to cap off the 92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Festival—Brooks has ingeniously removed the bleachers from the Ailey Citigroup theatre and scattered seats around multiple mini-stages, artfully arranged. On these, he presents highlights from his repertory, each in a single hue: the pink feather boas and ruffled briefs of "Dance-o-matic" (2002), the green panels of "Acre" (2004). After the intermission, "Happy Lucky Sun" premieres, in Day-Glo yellow, with some of Brooks's most extreme acrobatic minimalism to date: the dancers hover horizontal over the ground almost as much as they stand on their feet. (405 W. 55th St. 212-415-5500. March 12-13 and March 15 at 8 and March 16 at 2.)

AVIVA GEISMAR/DRASTIC ACTION

"Line of Descent" grew out of a residency in the German birthplace of Geismar's grandparents, who died in Auschwitz, but the resulting work has less the creepiness of German expressionism than that of sophomoric overacting. Powerful, generalized emotions such as self-hatred and the fear of intimacy are handled bluntly: dancers scrubbing themselves with sanders or asking each other maniacally, "Can I touch you here?" Neither satire nor psychological penetration emerges, as Geismar asks more of her young performers than they can deliver. (Dance New Amsterdam, 280 Broadway, at Chambers St. 212-279-4200. March 13-15 at 8 and March 16 at 3.)

JEREMY NELSON

For "Sail," premiering at Danspace Project, Nelson draws on his New Zealand heritage, with its English, Scottish, Maori, and Pacific Island influences. All are submerged deep within the contemporary-looking work, revealing themselves largely in rhythm and fleeting gesture—a skipping English country dance, a spiralling shape to suggest Maori wood carving. Nelson's turbulent "Mean Piece," from 2006, shares the program. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. March 13-15 at 8:30.)

DANCEMOPOLITAN / "SOUTHERN COMFORT"

At Joe's Pub, the witty Monica Bill Barnes and Deborah Lohse will host a cabaret-style mish-mash of short dance works inspired by country musicians such as Johnny Cash, Patsy Cline, and Dolly Parton, by a slew of downtown choreographers, including Gina Gibney, Mary Ann Wall, and Paul Singh. Live music will be provided by the Brooklyn-based nouveau-country outfit Dang-It Bobbys. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. March 14-15 at 9:30.)

"MERCE MY WAY"

Merce Cunningham's dancers are powerful, god-like creatures on the stage, exuding vigor and an inhuman stamina. And so it is with Mikhail Baryshnikov's photographs of them; as the former dancer and peripatetic artist puts it, his photographs are an exploration of the "extremes and restraints of the dancer's body." By allowing the blurred edges of his figures to approximate the drive and scope of Cunningham's movement, these figures become powerful angels clad in white, or blood-red avenging spirits. (401 Projects, 401 West St. 212-633-6202. March 18-May 4.)

SPIRIT OF UGANDA

This troupe of child performers was formed in 1996 as a way to communicate both the vibrancy and the tragedy of life in East Africa; the dancers and singers, ranging in age from eight to twenty-two, are masterly performers of East African dance forms, but they are also messengers of a harsh reality, Africa's crippling AIDS epidemic. Most of the members of the troupe are in fact orphans because of the disease, including its dynamic young director, Peter Kasule, who leads the audience through exhilarating demonstrations of dances such as the *larakaraka* (from the border region between Uganda and Sudan), the *ekitaguriro* (a dance of the nomadic people of Western Uganda), and the *bakisimba* (a traditional dance of the Buganda, the largest Ugandan ethnic group). (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 18 at 7. Through March 23.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

The soprano Ruth Ann Swenson, perhaps not the most magnetic singer in the world but still a house favorite, leads the cast of "La Traviata" along with the charismatic German tenor Jonas Kaufmann (as Alfredo) and the dependable American baritone Dwayne Croft; Marco Armiliato, the Met's impressive young Italian hand, conducts. (March 12 and March 15 at 8.) ♦ Mary Zimmerman's new production of "Lucia di Lammermoor" (set in Victorian-era Scotland) returns to the house, after opening the season back in September. Its thrilling singer of the title role, Natalie Dessay, is back, along with the superb Mariusz Kwiecien and John Relyea. New to the team is Giuseppe Filianoti, as Edgardo; Joseph Colaneri. (March 13 at 8.) ♦ Deborah Voigt embarks upon her long-awaited first rendition at the Met of Isolde in "Tristan und Isolde," performing a role she sang to acclaim in Vienna. Ben Heppner takes the other title role, heading a cast that also features Michelle DeYoung (Brangäne) and the great veteran Matti Salminen (King Marke); James Levine. (March 14 and March 18 at 7.) ♦ The Met's entertaining new production of "Peter Grimes" by John Doyle (who directed the recent Broadway revivals of "Sweeney Todd" and "Company"), offers a brisk, unsentimental, and rather urban take on Benjamin Britten's tragic masterpiece from 1945, set in a nineteenth-century fishing village on the North Sea. The tenor Anthony Dean Griffey, relishing the opportunity of a lifetime, takes the title role. With the excellent Patricia Racette and Anthony Michaels-Moore; the fine Scottish maestro Donald Runnicles conducts. (March 15 at 1:30.) ♦ Verdi's fifth opera, "Ernani," written in 1844, lacks the presence in popular culture of such works as "La Traviata" and "Rigoletto" but boasts a bushel

JESSE LEFKOWITZ



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10,000 WOMEN

of big tunes and shameless melodrama that keeps the fans coming. In the title role, Marcello Giordani, the Met's mainstay in the Italian-tenor department these days, will attempt to fill the shoes of such legends as Pavarotti, Martinelli, and Del Monaco, heading a cast that also features such singers as Sondra Radvanovsky, Thomas Hampson, and Ferruccio Furlanetto; Roberto Abbado. (March 17 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA

This spring's Baroque novelty is Henry Purcell's "King Arthur," which, in a new production directed and choreographed by Mark Morris, should be anything but typical: ditching John Dryden's text (Purcell's piece is officially a "semi-opera"—that is, musical decoration for a spoken play), Morris turns the musical numbers into a risqué, over-the-top revue that will show off the talents of the singers (including the house débutants Mhairi Lawson, Iestyn Davies, and Stephen Sanders) and of his Mark Morris Dance Group. The costumes are by Isaac Mizrahi; Jane Glover conducts. (March 12 at 7:30, March 13 and March 15 at 8, and March 15 at 1:30. These are the final performances.) ♦ Mark Lamos's affectionate production of "Madama Butterfly," designed with clean lines and filled with a vast expanse of pastel blue, returns to the house. The cast features Shu-Ying Li, James Valenti, Jennifer Tiller, and Michael Chioldi; Steven Mosteller. (March 14 at 8 and March 16 at 1:30.) (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

Having delivered a hearty diet of Dvořák and Gershwin to the people of North Korea, New York's flagship orchestra offers more adventur-

ous fare back home under the auspices of Alan Gilbert, its music director designate. The world-première performances of the Symphony No. 2 ("Quintessence") by Marc Neikrug, best known as the artistic director of the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, precede Strauss's muscular paean of self-regard, "Ein Heldenleben"; the composer Steven Stucky introduces both of these "Hear & Now" concerts. (March 13 at 7:30 and March 15 at 8.) ♦ Gilbert also conducts the Strauss alone in a shorter "Rush Hour" concert (March 12 at 6:45) and in an "Inside the Music" performance, in which the piece will be discussed by the musicologist Gerard McBurney (March 14 at 8.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY

Michael Tilson Thomas, who has taken up the mantle of his mentor Leonard Bernstein as an advocate of mid-century American classics, leads his radiant ensemble at Carnegie Hall. March 11 at 8: Gil Shaham brings his considerable virtuosity to William Schuman's ruggedly beautiful Violin Concerto; the concert ends, appropriately, with Beethoven's Symphony No. 3 ("Eroica"). ♦ March 12 at 8: Thomas concludes the residency with a concert highlighted by the incandescent voice of Deborah Voigt, featured in Strauss's "Four Last Songs" and Barber's "Andromache's Farewell." The program is bookended by two symphonies, Sibelius's Seventh and Shostakovich's Ninth. (212-247-7800.)

PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA

Charles Dutoit, who will become the ensemble's chief conductor next season, leads it in an outgoing program: Bartók's "Miraculous Mandarin" Suite, Debussy's "Nocturnes," and Holst's "The Planets." (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 14 at 8.)

AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Ferdinand Hiller (1811-85) was one of the most prominent Jewish musicians of his time and a

close confidant of Mendelssohn and Brahms, but his music has not survived the passing of time. Leon Botstein, never one to be deterred by fashion, revives the composer's oratorio "The Destruction of Jerusalem" on his next concert with his intrepid orchestra (along with the Concert Chorale of New York). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. March 16 at 3.)

"MUSIC BEFORE 1800" SERIES:

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The series, which usually devotes its energies to importing topnotch early-music groups from abroad, presents a concert with the excellent choir of its host church, which will sing motets for Holy Week by Arcadelt, Bouzignac, and Du Caurroy. (529 W. 121st St. 212-666-9266. March 16 at 4.)

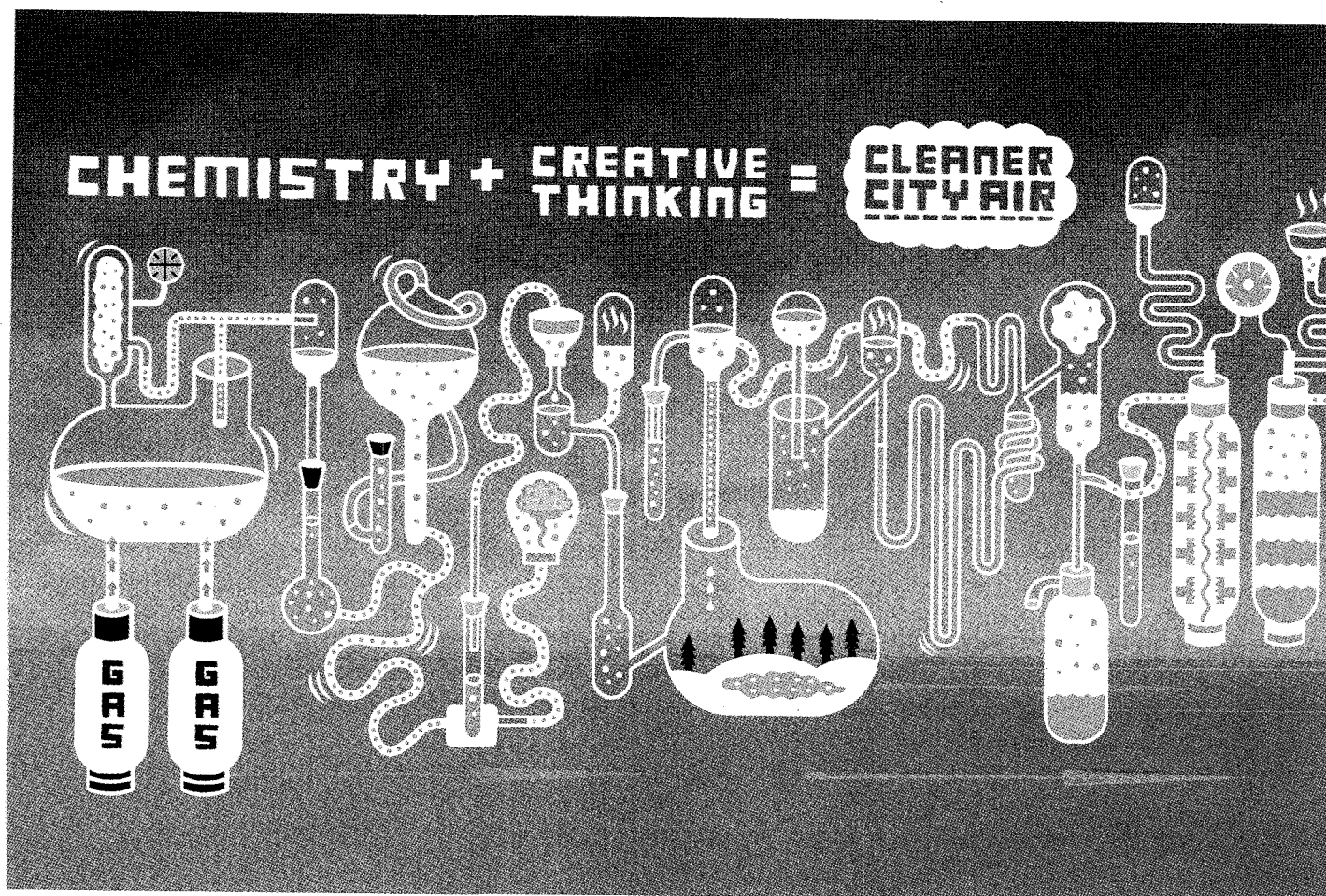
RECITALS

ARGENTO CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

Michel Galante's impressive group, which has established itself as an advocate for the most advanced European music, offers a concert of works by Giacinto Scelsi and Helmut Lachenmann (a world première) in the Italian Academy of Columbia University's ambitious new-music series. (Casa Italiana, 1161 Amsterdam Ave. 212-854-1623. March 12 at 7:30.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

In "The Pressler Connection," the society celebrates the enduring artistry and pedagogical influence of the beloved pianist Menahem Pressler in a program of works by Mozart, Dvořák, and Schubert (the "Trout" Quintet) in which he will be joined by a company of younger musicians that includes the cellist Gary Hoffman and the



violinist Beth Guterman. (New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 W. 64th St. March 16 at 5 and March 18 at 7:30.) (212-875-5788.)

JOEL FAN

The engaging young pianist, a classical performer with several years' experience in Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble, makes his New York solo recital debut at the Metropolitan Museum with a program mixing sonatas by Beethoven (in A-Flat Major, Op. 110), Chopin, and Leon Kirchner with contemporary works by Asian composers. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. March 14 at 7.)

ISABEL LEONARD

The young Metropolitan Opera mezzo-soprano, who made an acclaimed debut last fall in "Roméo et Juliette," makes her New York recital debut (shepherded by the wise pianist and coach Brian Zeger) with songs by Wolf, Hahn, and Rachmaninoff. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 14 at 7:30.)

LANG LANG

Carnegie Hall presents the latest recital by the dazzling piano phenom, who takes the stage with music by Mozart, Schumann (the Fantasy in C Major), and Liszt (the Hungarian Rhapsody No. 6 and the "Tristan und Isolde" paraphrase), along with several traditional Chinese works. (212-247-7800. March 15 at 8.)

AN DIE MUSIK

The affable and expert ensemble, a longtime favorite at Merkin Concert Hall, returns (with such friends as the violinist Colin Jacobsen and the cellist Edward Arron) to offer works by Mozart (the Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major), Arensky, and Mendelssohn (the Octet). (129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. March 16 at 4.)

MOVIES OPENING

BLIND MOUNTAIN

Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening March 12. (Film Forum.)

DOOMSDAY

A futuristic horror fantasy, directed by Neil Marshall, about a killer virus that reaches a major city. Starring Rhona Mitra and Bob Hoskins. Opening March 14. (In wide release.)

FUNNY GAMES

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening March 14. (In wide release.)

HEARTBEAT DETECTOR

Mathieu Amalric stars in Nicolas Klotz's drama, about a corporate psychologist who discovers an employee's dark secrets. In French. Opening March 14. (Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

HORTON HEARS A WHO!

An animated comedy based on the book by Dr. Seuss, directed by Jimmy Hayward and Steve Martino. With the voices of Steve Carell, Jim Carrey, Carol Burnett, and Seth Rogen. Opening March 14. (In wide release.)

NEVER BACK DOWN

A teen drama, set in Orlando, Florida, in the milieu of mixed martial arts. Directed by Jeff Wadlow; starring Sean Faris and Djimon Hounsou. Opening March 14. (In wide release.)

SLEEPWALKING

A drama about a man (Nick Stahl) who bonds with his niece (AnnaSophia Robb) after her mother (Charlize Theron) abandons her. Directed by William Maher. Opening March 14. (In wide release.)

SPUTNIK MANIA

A documentary, directed by David Hoffman, about the cultural effects of the U.S.S.R.'s Sputnik program, in the nineteen-fifties. Opening March 14. (IFC Center.)

WAR MADE EASY

A documentary, directed by Loretta Alper and Jeremy Earp and narrated by Sean Penn, about the writer Norman Solomon, who charges American media and the government with collusion. Opening March 14. (Quad Cinema.)

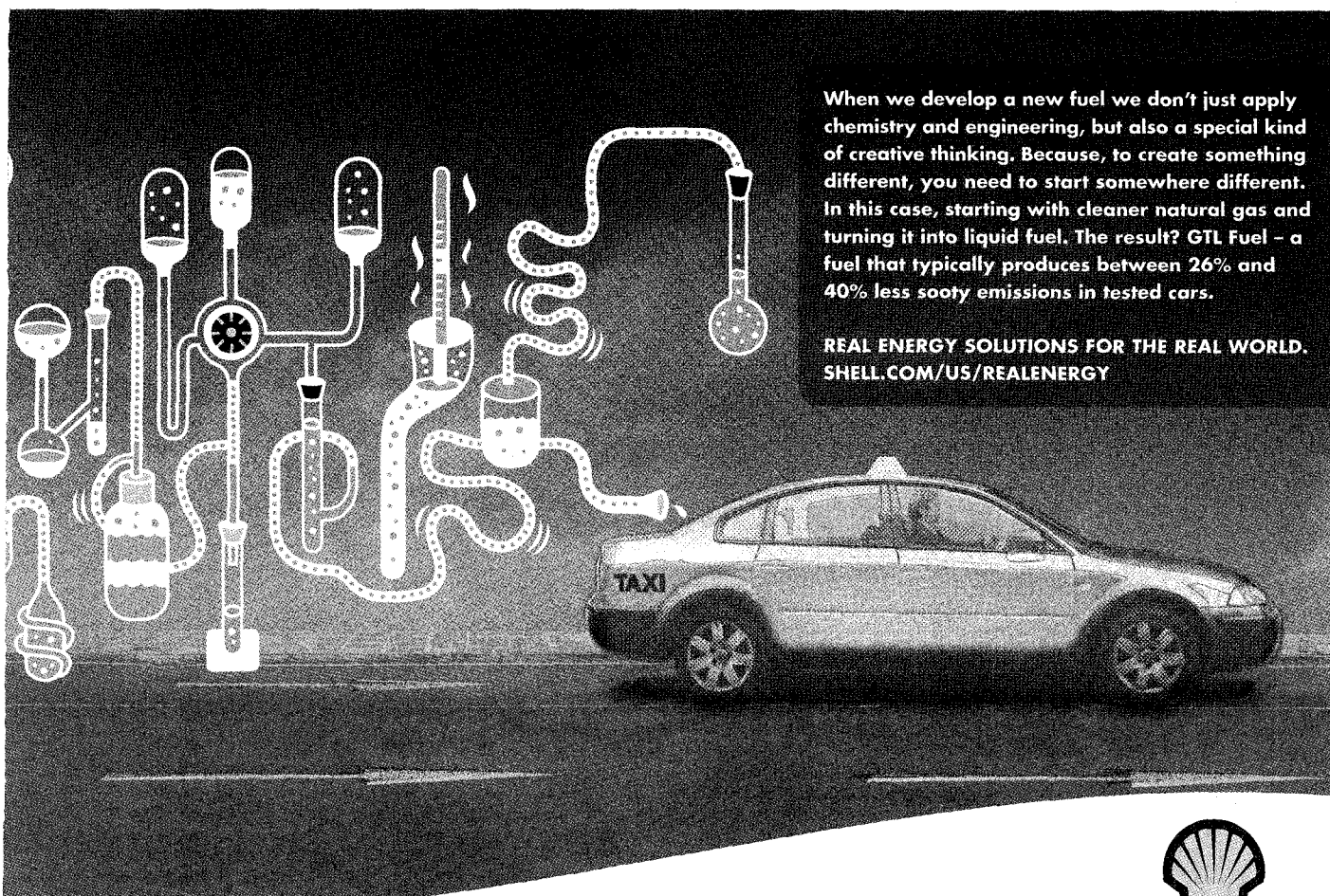
NOW PLAYING

THE BAND'S VISIT

Not a musical comedy but a low-key study of thwarted musicians, touched with comic grace. Written and directed by Eran Kolirin, it tells the story of an Egyptian police band that gets lost on a trip to Israel. The travelling musicians wind up in a desert town, dependent on the mercy and generosity of Dina (Ronit Elkabetz), the owner of a local café, who feeds them and finds them places to sleep. Their entire stay requires a delicate maintenance of dignity on both sides; the peace between old enemies is all the funnier for being so frail. Dina, one of the more forceful female characters in recent cinema, enjoys a melancholy half-flirtation with the band's leader (Sasson Gabai) and a more straightforward dalliance with one of his underlings. The music, when it finally strikes up, has an air of quiet celebration, and rightly so. In Arabic, Hebrew, and halting English.—Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 2/11 & 18/08.) (In wide release.)

THE BANK JOB

In 1971, some stumblebum thieves drilled their way into a branch of the Lloyds Bank in the Marylebone section of London and cleaned out the vault.



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Paradoxically, the robbery became famous, in part, because press coverage of it disappeared four days after the break-in was discovered. Did the British government intervene? The director Roger Donaldson and the veteran writing team of Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais have mixed these real-world events together with speculation and what feels like the party gossip of many decades. Princess Margaret (who disports herself with two men in the Caribbean), the black-power advocate Michael X, and various kinky upper-class swells are among the players. Donaldson races through the dubious or outrageous elements in the plot, directing the movie not as a farce but as a tight-knit crime thriller, with all the usual pleasures of the heist genre—sturdy fellows digging underground in order to get to a vault, the excitement of closing in on an enormous treasure, a smashing girl (the ex-model Saffron Burrows) who's connected to the caper, and so on. Starring, as the leader of the thieves, Jason Statham, who has clipped hair, burning eyes, and a hoarse voice that sounds like acid running over gravel.—*David Denby* (3/10/08) (In wide release.)

BE KIND REWIND

A new comedy, just about, from the director Michel Gondry, whose ability to dream up appealing conceits has yet to be matched by the will, or the coherence, to see them through. Jack Black plays a loafer named Jerry, who, after a spasm of electrocution, ends up erasing all the tapes in the local video store; he and a reluctant employee (Mos Def) set about filming homemade replacements for each movie, and, in the process, they attract a minor cult following. Gondry gives himself the chance to snipe and smile at bloated Hollywood productions, then wastes it. We see mere snippets of Jerry's own versions, but that is more than enough; worse still, the story that Gondry weaves around them feels no less shapeless and amateur, and his pretense that an entire present-day community (in Passaic, New Jersey) would stop to laud such ramblings is, at best, nostalgically naive. With Mia Farrow, who looks genuinely bewildered, and Danny Glover.—*A.L.* (2/25/08) (In wide release.)

BLIND MOUNTAIN

The writer-director Li Yang's stunningly realistic drama, a furious denunciation of injustices in contemporary China, is designed to elicit from viewers a primal cry of anger. Bai (Huang Lu), a young woman who has recently graduated from a big-city university, is hired as a saleswoman of herbal medicines and accompanies her boss and a colleague on a business trip to an isolated, mountainous rural village. There, they drug her, steal her I.D., and vanish, having sold her to a local peasant to be his wife. Confined, beaten, chained, and raped, she is still unwilling to submit to her fate, but her every effort to escape is thwarted by a society of permanent surveillance. Li reveals corruption at every level of Chinese society, including the urban nouveaux riches who sold Bai; the police, who demand payment for an investigation; and an E.R. doctor who won't perform lifesaving first aid without cash in hand. As if to prove who's to blame, the new outfit that Bai's captors bring her is bright red, just like the arm-bands of Party officials and the flags that greet them. As Bai peers out from her domestic prison at the majestic mountain vistas, they look like a wasteland of barbaric ignorance and official oppression. In Mandarin.—*Richard Brody* (Film Forum.)

BLOOD OF THE BEASTS

At the Porte de Vanves, it's horses; at the Porte de Pantin, near the Ourcq canal, it's cows; and at the la Villette market it's sheep that were killed for meat. Georges Franju's brief 1949 documentary account of the slaughterhouses of Paris—not for the fainthearted—summons these evocative names and picturesque places to connect the romance of labor with the horror of spurting blood, twitching limbs, and desperate eyes. Beginning with children's play and adults' trysts and ending with moody urban vistas, he connects the city's throbbing energy with the work of death. Introducing the workers by name, Franju presents the tools and practices of their trade, from the knives and captive bolt pistols to the fatal blows to the flaying and gutting of the carcasses, with a hallucinatory attention to detail. These knackers, with their cigarettes dangling from their lips,

easy camaraderie, and nonchalant vigor, are the living models of emblematic characters in novels and movies—one even sings, with a suave baritone, Charles Trenet's classic "La Mer" as another whistles along. Besides sympathy for the animals and a dubious view of carnivores, Franju evokes the collective brutality of which the refinements of culture are made.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives; March 15-16 and March 18.)

CHARLIE BARTLETT

With teen comedies, as with teen-agers themselves, cleverness goes only so far without heart; if this film has one, it's artificial. The protagonist (Anton Yelchin), a rich kid who's been thrown out of prep school and lands in a suburban public high school, shows up in a blazer and tie and wonders why he doesn't fit in. Shades of "Rushmore," of course—they wish. Charlie ingratiates himself with his classmates by becoming their unofficial psychopharmacologist, and comes into conflict with the hip, beleaguered principal (Robert Downey, Jr.) when he starts to date his savvy daughter (Kat Dennings). The director, Jon Poll, never finds the right tone; the comedy careens from cloying to over-the-top, the breakthroughs and the revelations come with no price, and, despite fine, vulnerable performances from Dennings and Downey, the film, with its prefab resolutions, is utterly devoid of life.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

TABLES FOR TWO SMITH'S

79 MacDougal St. (212) 260-0100—Occupying a space between Caffè Dante and the New York Rifle Club that formerly housed a halfhearted Italian trattoria, Smith's successfully, if slightly self-consciously, presents itself as a cozy little discovery. The central room—a narrow railroad-car space, painted cream, lined with black banquettes, and boasting a ceiling panelled with slightly foxed antique mirrors—feels both intimate and dramatic; it's only when the place is very busy that you realize that it's essentially a corridor leading straight from the kitchen.

The menu combines some new-American gestures (cue mentions of succchokes, the Hudson Valley, and things being "line-caught") with a style that is basically Italian: dishes include homemade *corzetti* (a coin-shaped pasta from Genoa) and a steamed egg with Gorgonzola-tinted polenta, which achieves a satisfying fusion of posset-like smoothness and cheesy tang. The chef, Pablo Romero, subtly enlivens well-worn favorites; roasted beets come with a horseradish cream that provides the very gentlest of kicks. Indeed, accompaniments sometimes outshine main dishes. Recently, the dryness of a filet of striped bass was soon forgotten thanks to the wintry gratifications to be found

lowered embraced at the time. The trial itself, which the combined misbehavior of the defendants and the judge turned into a shambles, is re-created in animation, with the actors Mark Ruffalo, Liev Schreiber, Jeffrey Wright, the late Roy Scheider, and others voicing the characters; the courtroom scenes are keyed to actual films of the 1968 protests, an amazingly detailed archival collection of news and personal footage. The animation suits the antic goings on at the trial, and the editing of the archival footage is superb, but Morgen ignores everything else—including the struggles within the Democratic Party and the effect of the protests on the country for years to come. At a moment when a youth movement has gathered behind a candidate capable of seizing power the old-fashioned way, Hoffman and Rubin's nonsense about "revolution" just looks lame.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

THE COUNTERFEITERS

This Austrian film, winner of an Oscar for Best Foreign Film, is the true story of Salomon Smolianoff—known in the movie as Salomon Sorowitsch, or Sally (Karl Markovics), the most skilled counterfeiter in prewar Berlin, and also a bon vivant, a ladies' man, a cynic, and an opportunist. Arrested in 1936, Sally, a Russian-born Jew, is sent to Mauthausen concentration camp, in Germany, where he survives for five years by painting Nazi kitsch. In 1944, he's transferred to another camp, Sachsenhausen, just outside Berlin, and placed at the head of Operation Bernhard, a counterfeiting workshop run by the S.S. and staffed



underneath it: flageolet beans, *guanciale* stew, and leek fondue. Occasionally, the intricacies seem a little overdone. Romero has a radical way with brussels sprouts, peeling them like cabbages and tossing the leaves with oil and slivered almonds. Ingenious, certainly, but the sprouts, deprived of their tight, balled crunch, emerge as a sorry and laborious simulacrum of potato chips.

The restaurant's casual sleekness seems ideally pitched to a clientele of well-heeled but unostentatious thirty- and forty-somethings. The mellow atmosphere reaches a kind of laid-back climax in the tiny bar at the back, which has velvet walls that somehow put one in mind of the Frick. Here you can eat from the main menu or enjoy such neo-bar snacks as Parmesan truffled devilled eggs. On a cold night, the bar is deliciously snug, and it's accordingly packed. At busy restaurants, it's not unusual to be offered a spot at the bar if there's no table ready. Here, waiting for a place at the bar late on a Friday, you may be asked if you wouldn't rather simply eat at a table instead. (Open daily for dinner. Entrées \$22-\$28.)

—*Leo Carey*

CHICAGO 10

A group of liberated, spontaneous young men (Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, Rennie Davis, Tom Hayden, Bobby Seale, et al.) against the squares and the prissy-voiced elderly (the prosecutor Thomas Foran, Judge Julius Hoffman): that's the way the director Brett Morgen conceives the trial of the Chicago Seven, in March, 1969, when the hippies, yuppies, pacifists, and student leftists who organized the protests at the Democratic Convention the previous summer were charged with conspiracy. (Morgen stretched the number to ten by adding Bobby Seale and two defense lawyers.) In other words, he sees the trial in the same romantic-revolutionary terms that the defendants and their fol-

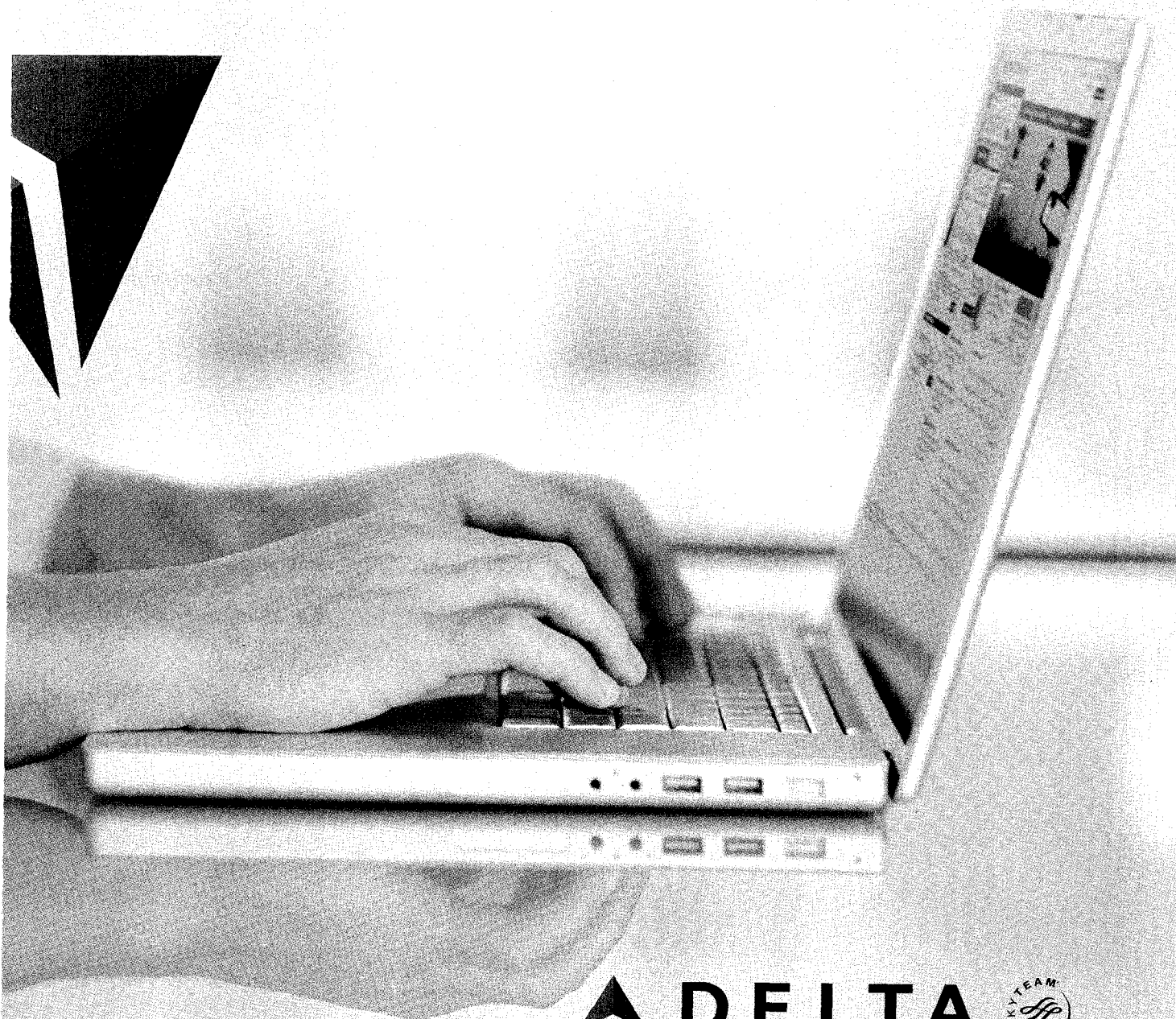
by Jewish prisoners skilled as printers and graphic artists. Sally's unit produces the British pound in bulk, but his perfect design for the dollar is sabotaged by a Communist printer in the group, Adolf Burger (August Diehl), a fiery anti-Nazi who can't bring himself to help the German war effort. The movie is devoted to Sally's genius for survival, his efforts to keep the group together and to prevent the heroic Burger from attaining the martyrdom he appears to long for. Markovics has a hatchet face, aggressive but guarded, even closed off, but with a glint in his eyes. The movie keeps us close to him, and we learn, with increasing admiration, how his mind works. "The Counterfeiters" is a testament to guile. The writer-director, Ste-

SARAH MANGESON

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fan Ruzowitzky, scored the picture with tangos, which are meant to be Sally's music—seductive, insolent, triumphant.—*D.D.* (3/3/08) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

DEFINITELY, MAYBE

The mild-eyed actor Ryan Reynolds is perhaps too recessive for starring roles in the movies. In this romantic comedy, he plays a young man who can't decide which of three women he wants. His character, Will Hayes, is supposed to be a little lost, but the performance itself is tentative. A big, strong-looking guy, Reynolds doesn't know what to do with his body. Yet "Definitely, Maybe," which was written and directed by Adam Brooks, has charm and spirit. The movie is set in Manhattan during Bill Clinton's first Presidential campaign and the years that followed, when the hero's ambitions and romantic mishaps are plotted against the President's troubles with women and the disillusion of the later Clinton period. Will shapes the tale himself, describing his romantic life to his smart little daughter (Abigail Breslin), at her insistence, but changing the names, so she can't tell which of his three girlfriends will turn out to be her mother. Elizabeth Banks, a slender blonde, plays a Midwesterner with a sense of honor so highly developed she argues herself out of happiness; Isla Fisher, short, with thick auburn hair, is a changeable free spirit who keeps Will—and maybe herself—off balance with a teasing perversity; and Rachel Weisz, in her best movie work to date, is smart, flirtatious, and stunningly untrustworthy as a very ambitious journalist.—*D.D.* (3/3/08) (In wide release.)

THE DUCHESS OF LANGEAIS

The Duchess of Langeais (Jeanne Balibar) has some sort of husband, and, though he's nowhere in sight, she is not free to leave him or to carry on an affair with General Armand de Montriveau (Guillaume Depardieu), a gloomy but arresting figure from the Napoleonic years, who adores her. The general pursues, and the duchess, intellectual yet worldly and flirtatious, resists. And then they change places: she pursues, and he withdraws. In Jacques Rivette's remarkable adaptation of a Balzac novella, set during the reactionary Restoration period (the eighteenth-twenties), devotion is turned into a perverse kind of warfare, in which a lover who admits that he's in love loses the campaign. Rivette, a New Wave original from a half-century ago, now seventy-nine years old, creates an atmosphere of unrivalled stillness. The calm and orderly beauty, the exquisite rooms (formal yet lived in), exert a hushed fascination. Both the man and the woman hesitate before speaking and then utter perfectly formed sentences. The syntactical duelling is attended by mute servants who carry candles from room to room—the movie makes us aware of the erotic power of both light and darkness. In French.—*D.D.* (3/10/08) (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

4 MONTHS, 3 WEEKS AND 2 DAYS

There may be filmgoers who still harbor a footling prejudice against tales of Romanian abortion; in which case, here is the way to trounce them. Cristian Mungiu's forbidding drama, the winner of the Palme d'Or at last year's Cannes Film Festival, is set in Bucharest in 1987. Anamaria Marinca stars as Otilia, a young student trying to help a friend and finding herself thwarted, at every turn, by a jaded and hostile world. Her roommate, the hapless Gabita (Laura Vasiliu), wants to be rid of the baby she is carrying; abortion, however, is illegal, and thus, like almost everything in the city, is subject to the vagaries (and the perils) of the black market. So much about this story could have grown gruesome and sensational; instead, even the central deed—performed by the foul-hearted Mr. Bebe (Vlad Ivanov)—is filmed with unerring control. As for Marinca, she draws us ever nearer with her balance of composure and exasperation; how come the Academy took no notice of this actress? In truth, what Mungiu has made is not an abortion picture; it is a study of a system too exhausted to handle love and death. In Romanian.—*A.L.* (1/28/08) (In limited release.)

FROWNLAND

This amazingly accomplished first feature by Ronald Bronstein, made with a crew of four for seemingly little more than the cost of film stock, throbs with

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK KEEPING IT REAL

Edgar Degas said that looking at Gustave Courbet's paintings made him feel as if he were being nuzzled by the wet nose of a calf. That's an apt analogy for a tremendous Courbet retrospective that invades the Metropolitan Museum with pungencies proper to



barnyards, bedrooms, and buggy dells. Courbet is the most purely forceful—because he's forcefully impure, spitting on purity—painter of all time. (Among the Old Masters, only Tintoretto comes close.) "Realism," his byword, describes less his method—a talented mélange of cunning and not so cunning, brazen artifices—than effects that stupefy the mind as only reality, when it overloads the senses, can. Vision is addressed, but vicarious touch and smell take delivery. Courbet's drenching seascapes should come with towels and his steaming nudes with towelettes. He revels in the quiddity of paint: moist dirt. His art isn't about life; it is life precipitated, with raucous panache. Nothing could be better therapy for a bodiless society of cybernetic narcissisms than the mad wallow of this show.

—Peter Schjeldahl

the energy and vision that independent filmmaking is all about. The story concerns the struggles of a nearly aphasic, socially challenged, yet smart, painfully self-aware, and desperately lonely young man to get through his days and nights. Keith (Dore Mann) is the odd man out in the crew of chirpy losers with whom he works selling coupon books door to door; he has a woman friend, Laura (Mary Wall, Bronstein's wife), who is even more tormented and self-destructive than he is, and an irresponsible roommate whose own travails end in ruin. Bronstein specializes in moments of embarrassment and minor emotional bruises which blend pain with gentle, witty humor. With a sharp eye for telling details, he avoids satire and bathos and creates characters of a rare complexity, which his incisive yet passionate visual style (with its rare attention to light and its absence) realizes empathetically. If there's any justice, Mann, whom Bronstein found working in a supermarket, will get an award for his transfixing performance; his clenched jaws, squinting eyes, and stifled speech avoid all stereotypes as he brings the character to life from within.—*R.B.* (IFC Center.)

IN BRUGES

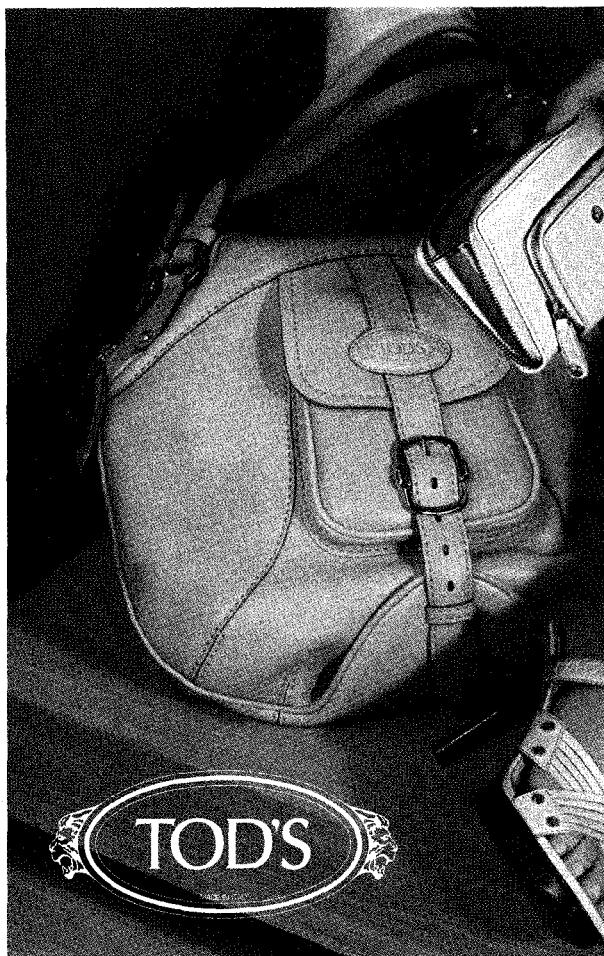
A rare misfire from the Irish playwright Martin McDonagh, whose short film "Six Shooter" won him an Oscar in 2006. His first full-length movie finds a couple of Irish assassins, Ken (Brendan Gleeson) and Ray (Colin Farrell), hiding out in Bruges, Belgium; hardly an obvious refuge for murderers, although McDonagh could have done more with the sinister peace in which even the prettiest canal city can be enfolded. There is something to savor in the early scenes, as the jovial, cultivated Ken squares off against his more impatient sidekick, and their backchat hits an appealing rhythm. Halfway through, however, the film subsides into a mess, exchanging patter for the less amusing spectacle of bullet wounds and bursting heads. If McDonagh wanted to prove himself more than a wordsmith, this was not the way to go about it. With Ralph Fiennes as the men's employer, the most foulmouthed of the three.—*A.L.* (2/11 & 18/08) (In wide release.)

JUMPER

Doug Liman, who made his name with "Swingers"—low on budget, high on talk—has arrived, a dozen years later, at the opposite. His new movie, though full of galloping special effects, is numb and dumb on the issue of human interaction. After a near-death experience, David Rice (Hayden Christensen) finds himself blessed with the gift of teleportation; he can spirit his body from one place to another, anywhere in the world. He does this involuntarily at first, then at will, though we are not told what caused the change. He can enter a bank, grab a sack of cash, and beam back to his apartment. He can take an old girlfriend (Rachel Bilson) to Rome for the day, without any clear idea of what to do there. The only glitch is the presence of Roland (Samuel L. Jackson), one of the Paladins—a group dedicated to finding and neutralizing the Jumpers. (Again, we never learn why.) The movie, smartly set up, soon dribbles away; Jamie Bell lends it some energy, in the role of a twitchy fellow-Jumper, but the cameo handed to Diane Lane (as the hero's mother) is an insult. Who could watch this farrago and still maintain that travel broadens the mind?—*A.L.* (2/25/08) (In wide release.)

PARANOID PARK

Gus Van Sant, the director of "My Own Private Idaho" and "Elephant" (as well as many other films), back in dreamy teen-beauty mode. Alex (Gabe Nevins), a Portland boy from a broken home, spends his life at a local skateboard park along with dozens of other disaffected kids. Alex accidentally kills a security guard but tells no one. Christopher Doyle, who shot the movie (in part with an 8-mm. camera), swings back and forth within the curved cement tunnels and declivities of the park along with the kids, and the movie reaches a kind of nirvana of affectlessness. The moral questions are hardly addressed, much less resolved, and when the camera settles on Gabe Nevins's angel face, we learn nothing of what's in the boy's head. Van Sant, adapting a novel by Blake Nelson, made the movie largely with nonactors, many of them found on MySpace.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)



SNOW ANGELS

One can be entirely in favor of the glum splendor of winter landscapes and the dramatization of failed marriages, adultery, forlorn kids, and out-of-tune school marching bands and still find this movie a bit too dreary to sit through. Among the freezing participants are Kate Beckinsale, who is excellent as a distraught mother who can't get away from her wreck of a husband (Sam Rockwell), Nicky Katt as a hapless ladies' man, Amy Sedaris as his game wife, and Michael Angarano and Olivia Thirlby as teen-agers who find each other, or at least warmth, beneath the covers. The director, David Gordon Green, adapted the novel by Stewart O'Nan. Shot in Halifax and elsewhere in Nova Scotia.—*D.D.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)



"Blind Mountain," written and directed by Li Yang, opens at Film Forum March 12.

AN UNMARRIED WOMAN

Paul Mazursky wrote and directed this buoyant, enormously friendly comedy about Erica (Jill Clayburgh) and her attempt to get back into "the stream of life" after her marriage of sixteen years breaks up. It's a tenderhearted feminist picture. What may be disappointing to those who love Mazursky's earlier work is that in trying to identify with Erica and tell the story from a woman's point of view he shies away from having her look foolish; in crucial parts, he suppresses his sense of satire, and the picture becomes virtuous. With Alan Bates, whose fine comic, expansive performance as Saul Kaplan, a famous painter, overpowers the movie. Saul is such a rich, loamy Father Earth figure that when Erica resists him in order to satisfy her yearnings for independence, she seems puny and a bit of an idiot. Released in 1978.—*Pauline Kael* (Thalia Theatre; March 16 and March 18.)

U2 3D

One of the world's greatest rock bands gets the full 3-D treatment in this fantastic concert film, directed by Catherine Owens and Mark Pellington. Filmed in the course of a week's worth of performances in Buenos Aires during the band's 2006 "Vertigo" tour, the movie features more than a dozen tunes, performed to perfection and infused with the overt, loving excitement of a band that lives for musical transcendence. Owens and Pellington's use of multiple cameras, particularly those placed among the adoring crowds, brings a joyous human element to the show, and the concert has been distilled to a heady eighty-five minutes that showcases some of the greatest work the band has ever done. It may be the best concert film since "Stop Making Sense."—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

VANTAGE POINT

Zero art, but a triumph of engineering. An attempted assassination of the President of the United States in

Spain is seen from the point of view of six participants in the events, one version after another, with each adding a little more information. The many views of the same events have to synch up visually, a feat that can't be easy to pull off, and the sheer hurtling force of so much of the action—people running hard, cars racing down streets—is exciting to watch. Like the ancient philosophers or medieval mystics, we long to perceive the secret and idiosyncratic pattern within chaos, the singular currents running through the tumultuous sea. We are denied this in life, since we can never recall everything in a messy event happening around us, no matter how many times we replay it in our heads; in a brutally efficient way, the writer, Barry Levy, and the director, Pete Travis, have achieved this. With Dennis

Quaid as a Secret Service agent, William Hurt as the President, Forest Whitaker as a bystander with a camera, and various swarthy actors as (presumably) Islamic terrorists.—*D.D.* (3/3/08) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

COLLEGE ROAD TRIP: In wide release. **CJ7:** In wide release. **MISS PETTIGREW LIVES FOR A DAY:** In wide release. **SEMI-PRO:** In wide release. **10,000 B.C.:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"Essential Cinema: Sergei Eisenstein." March 12 at 7:30: "Battleship Potemkin" (1925; silent). ♦ March 14 at 7:30: "October" (1928; silent, with Russian intertitles). ♦ March 15 at 5:30: "Old and New" (1929; silent, with Russian intertitles). ♦ March 16 at 4: "Alexander Nevsky" (1938; in Russian, no subtitles). ♦ March 16 at 6:30: "Ivan the Terrible: Parts 1 and 2" (1942-46; in Russian). ♦ Special screening, March 15 at 8: Short films about cats, featuring "Nightcats" (Stan Brakhage, 1956; silent). ♦ The films of Georges Franju. March 14 at 7 and March 17 at 9:15: "Head Against the Wall" (1959; in French). ♦ March 14 at 9 and March 16 at 5: "Eyes Without a Face" (1960; in French). ♦ March 15 at 5, March 16 at 7, and March 18 at 9:15: Short films, including "Blood of the Beasts" (†). ♦ March 15 and 18 at 7 and March 16 at 9: "Judex" (1963; in French). ♦ March 15 at 9:15 and March 17 at 7: "Thérèse Desqueyroux" (1962; in French).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—Through March 30: The films of Manoel de Oliveira. Except where noted, all films are in Portuguese. March 13 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Rite of Spring" (1963). ♦ March 14 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Cannibals" (1988). ♦ March 15 at 6:15: "Doomed Love" (1978). ♦ March 16 at 3 and 7: "Francisca" (1981). ♦ "30 Years of J. Hoberman." March 17 at 6:50: "Rome '78" (1978, James Nares). ♦ March 17 at 9:15: "She Had Her Gun All Ready" (1978, Vivienne Dick) and "Black Box" (1979, Beth B. and Scott B.). ♦ March 18 at 6:50 and 9:15: "The King of Comedy" (1983, Martin Scorsese).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. March 12-13 at 1, 2:50, 4:40, 6:30, 8:20, and 10:10: "It Always Rains on Sunday" (1947, Robert Hamer). ♦ March 12-18 at 1, 2:50, 4:40, 6:30, 8:20, and 10:10: "Last Year at Marienbad" (1961, Alain Resnais; in French). ♦ March 14-27 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "Contempt" (1963, Jean-Luc Godard; in French, English, German, and Italian).

FRENCH INSTITUTE

ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through March 25: "James Ivory in Paris." March 18 at 12:30 and 7: "Surviving Picasso" (1996; in English). ♦ March 18 at 4 and 9:30: "Surviving Picasso" (1996; in French).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. March 14-16 at 11 A.M.: "My Dinner with Andre" (1981, Louis Malle). ♦ "Waverly Midnight." March 14-15: "Footloose" (1984, Herbert Ross).

JAPAN SOCIETY

333 E. 47th St. (212-715-1258)—"No Borders, No Limits: 1960s Nikkatsu Action Cinema." March 14 at 7:30: "Plains Wanderer" (1960, Buichi Saito; in Japanese).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving." March 12, March 13, and March 14 at 1:30: "Panic in the Streets" (1950, Elia Kazan). ♦ "Rex Harrison: A Centenary Tribute." March 12 at 7: "My Fair Lady" (1964, George Cukor). ♦ March 13 at 6: "The Rake's Progress" (1945, Sidney Gilliat). ♦ March 13 at 8:30: "Major Barbara" (1941, Gabriel Pascal). ♦ March 14 at 7: "King Richard and the Crusaders" (1954, David Butler). ♦ March 16 at 4:30: "The Honey Pot" (1966, Joseph L. Mankiewicz). ♦ "Canadian Front, 2008." March 13 at 7, March 14 at 4:15, March 15 at 3 and 5:15, March 16 at 2, March 17 at 8, and March 18 at 5: "Poor Boy's Game" (2007, Clement Virgo). ♦ March 14 at 6:15 and March 18 at 7:30: "The Tracey Fragments" (2007, Bruce McDonald). ♦ March 14 at 8:30: "Breakfast with Scot" (2007, Laurie Lynd). ♦ March 15 at 2 and March 17 at 6: "Family Motel" (2007, Helene Klodowsky). ♦ March 15 at 4:30 and March 18 at 5: "Continental, a Film without Guns" (2007, Stéphane Lafleur). ♦ March 15 at 7: "Days of Darkness" (2007, Denys Arcand).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—"Cabaret Cinema." March 14 at 9:30: "Dark City," the director's cut (1998, Alex Proyas).

SUNSHINE CINEMA

143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@ Midnight." March 14-15: "Purple Rain" (1984, Albert Magnoli).

THALIA THEATRE

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"Best Films of 1978." March 16 at 2:30 and March 18 at 7:30: "An Unmarried Woman" (†). ♦ March 16 at 7:30 and March 18 at 2:30: "Grease" (Randal Kleiser).

WALTER RADE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—The films of Kim Ki-young. All films are in Korean. March 12 at 2 and March 13 at 8:30: "Goryeojeang" (1963). ♦ March 12 at 4:10 and March 16 at 6:15: "Transgression" (1974). ♦ March 12 at 6:30 and March 16 at 1:30: "The Housemaid" (1960). ♦ March 12 at 9 and March 14 at 6:30: "The Insect Woman" (1972). ♦ March 13 at 1 and



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6:30: "Yongsan Province" (1955). ♦ March 14 at 1 and March 16 at 8:30: "Ban Geumryeon" (1981). ♦ March 14 at 8:45 and March 18 at 4: "Carnivore" (1984). ♦ March 15 at 5:45 and March 17 at 1:15: "Promise of the Flesh" (1975). ♦ March 15 at 8 and March 17 at 3:30: "I-eo Island" (1977). ♦ March 16 at 3:45 and March 18 at 8:15: "The Woman of Fire '82" (1982). ♦ March 17 at 6 and March 18 at 1:30: "Earth" (1978). ♦ March 17 at 8:30 and March 18 at 6:15: "Free Maiden" (1982).

READINGS AND TALKS

92ND STREET Y

Robert Storr, the dean of the Yale University School of Art and a former curator at the Museum of Modern Art, talks with the conceptual artist Vik Muniz. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. March 13 at 8:15.)

BENJAMIN BLACK

John Banville, who won a Booker Prize for his novel "The Sea," reads from his new crime novel, "The Silver Swan," which he wrote under the pen name Benjamin Black. (192 Books, 192 Tenth Ave., at 21st St. 212-255-4022. March 16 at 4.)

NATIONAL ARTS CLUB

The Community-Word Project, a nonprofit organization that places artists and writers in underserved New York City public schools, presents the writer Rigoberto González, who will read from his work. He'll be joined by the actor Dion Graham and students from local public schools. A benefit. (15 Gramercy Park S. For more information, call 212-962-3820. March 17 at 6:30.)

"TENEMENT TALKS"

The Irish writers Colum McCann and Colm Tóibín join the journalist and author Robert Sullivan for a St. Patrick's Day reading. (Lower East Side Tenement Museum, 108 Orchard St. 212-982-8420. March 17 at 6:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADE

The first New York City St. Patrick's Day parade took place in 1766, organized by Irish soldiers keeping the peace. The parade has grown a bit since those days. It takes over Fifth Ave. from 44th St. to 86th St., drawing marching bands, bagpipe players, and, of course, politicians. (March 17, starting at 11 A.M.)

"SPEAK UP!"

March 18 is the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. A number of concerned citizens, including the performance artist Laurie Anderson, the singer Antony, the indie rockers Blonde Redhead, the former Talking Heads front man David Byrne, the soft-jazz singer Norah Jones, and the Velvet Underground vet Lou Reed, plan to register their continued opposition to the war with a benefit concert at St. Ann's Warehouse. Proceeds go to two groups with similar interests, United for Peace and Justice and Iraq Veterans Against the War. An information fair with booths staffed by the New York Civil Liberties Union and other left-leaning organizations takes place nearby before the show. (38 Water St., Dumbo, Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. March 18 at 8. The info fair, which starts at 4, is at the powerHouse Arena, 37 Main St., Dumbo.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Asia Week overlaps with a slate of high-powered wine sales at the city's auction houses. On March 15, Sotheby's will be offering something of a rarity in the wine field—a cellar amassed by a woman, the successful entrepreneur Cheryl Womack, featuring an array of wines from Bordeaux, Burgundy, California, and Australia. Asia Week begins on March 17 with a sale of contemporary art, led by three paintings by the Chinese artist Zhang Xiaogang. The sale, which also includes works by other Chinese favorites, such as Yue Minjun, Zhang Wang, and Cai Guo-Qiang, is followed by a more sober offering of Chinese ceramics and works of art (March 18). (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ Christie's will be holding two wine sales this week, a general offering (March 15) that includes spirits, preceded by wines from a private collection (March 14), a feast for Bordeaux lovers. The house then kicks off its Asian sales with an auction of Japanese and Korean art (March 18) that features a late-twelfth-century Japanese wood sculpture of a seated Dainichi Nyorai—a manifestation of the Buddha—attributed to the prominent Kamakura-period sculptor Unkei. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ If auctions aren't your scene, head over to the International Asian Art Fair (March 15-19), a yearly extravaganza at which one can peruse the wares of dealers from across the country, Europe, and Asia. (583 Park Ave. 212-642-8572.)

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ON THE HORIZON

NIGHT LIFE FADE TO BLACK March 19

The operatically inclined singer-songwriter Rufus Wainwright has proposed turning off all electric lights and appliances for twelve hours on or around June 21, the summer solstice, to call attention to global warming, energy conservation, and the fate of the earth. To promote the idea a few months ahead of time, Wainwright will perform an entirely acoustic concert by candlelight at the Angel Orensanz Foundation. (www.blackoutsabbath.org)

MOVIES SHOCK OF THE NEW March 26-April 6

Co-hosted at MOMA and Walter Reade, "New Directors New Films" offers a selection of work from around the world, including "Jellyfish," the Caméra d'Or winner at Cannes last year, by the Israeli writers Etgar Keret and Shira Geffen, and Serge Bozon's First World War drama "La France." (212-721-6500)

ART MAKE IT WERK March 27-June 30

The exhibition "Wiener Werkstätte Jewelry," at the

Neue Galerie, will showcase more than forty masterpieces produced between 1903 and 1920 by the Austrian design group, alongside vintage photographs of people wearing the pieces. (212-628-6200.)

THE THEATRE STAR SYSTEM March 28

The Transport Group presents "Marcy in the Galaxy," a new musical by Nancy Shayne, based on a story by Shayne and the "Sex and the City" writer Michael Patrick King, about a woman's struggle to make it as an artist in New York

City. Jack Cummings III directs, at the Connelly. (212-352-3101.)

DANCE RUSSIAN SEASON April 1-20

The Kirov returns to New York for the first time in six years, for a three-week residency at City Center. Diana Vishneva will dance, as well as artists rarely seen here, such as Uliana Lopatkina, Alina Somova, and Leonid Sarafanov. The music will be played live by the Mariinsky Orchestra. (212-581-1212.)

The Transport Group's "Marcy in the Galaxy."

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ANTHONY BOURDAIN on what you don't
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JOHN CHEEVER on the sorrows of gin

ROALD DAHL on a connoisseur unmasked

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M.F.K. FISHER on the trouble with tripe

MALCOLM GLADWELL on building a better ketchup

ADAM GOPNIK on the crisis in French cooking

JIM HARRISON on his thirty-seven-course lunch

JANE KRAMER on the writer's kitchen

ANTHONY LANE on cooking by the book

CHANG-RAE LEE on eating sea urchin

A. J. LIEBLING on Paris and appetite

JANET MALCOLM on the Alice B. Toklas cookbook

STEVE MARTIN on menu mores

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JOHN MCPHEE on Euell Gibbons, master forager

JOSEPH MITCHELL .. on the beefsteak clubs of New York

SUSAN ORLEAN on the homesick Cuban restaurant

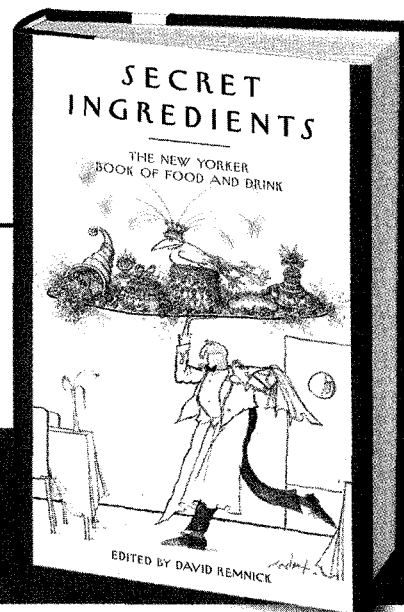
DOROTHY PARKER on dinner conversation

S. J. PERELMAN on a hollandaise assassin

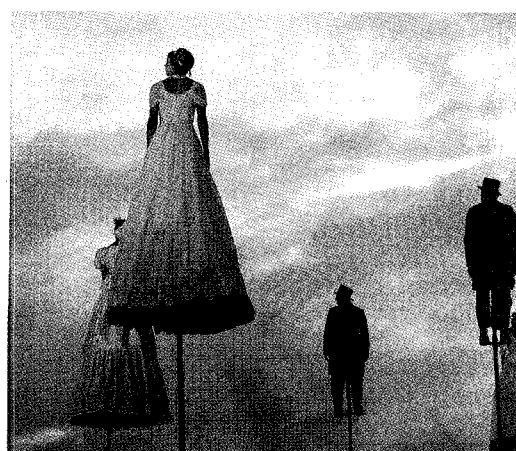
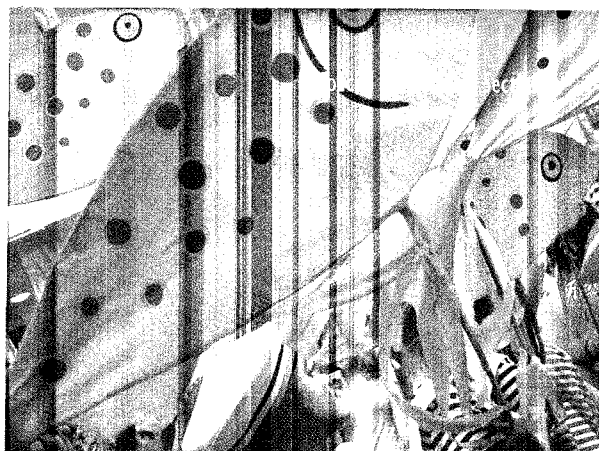
CALVIN TRILLIN on New York's best bagel

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IRELAND LIVE!

Experience the music, dance, and theatre at one of Ireland's many cultural festivals this year.
Spring through fall, spirited celebrations abound.

For centuries, St. Patrick's Day in Dublin was observed as a quiet religious holiday. Today, **St. Patrick's Festival** (March 13th–17th) is a multiday celebration. In the lead-up to the national holiday, the city is now the backdrop for scores of events, many of which are free.

On the seventeenth, larger-than-life puppets, elaborately costumed marchers, and bands participate in the exuberant street parade that starts in Parnell Square and ends at St. Patrick's Cathedral, attracting a crowd upwards of a half-million. In County Down, The Saint Patrick's Centre tells the story of the patron saint through interactive displays and insightful art exhibits.

Ireland's biggest cultural celebration, the **Galway Arts Festival** (July 14th–27th), mixes street art and high art, drawing performers, musicians, writers, artists, and as many as a hundred thousand festivalgoers. Last year's fortnight featured book readings as well as stagings of Brian Friel's "Philadelphia, Here I Come!" and Neil LaBute's "Autobahn." The award-winning writer and historian Simon Schama is among the notables invited to appear this year.

For more than half a century, the annual **Dublin Theatre Festival** (September 25th–October 12th) has enthralled audiences with updated classics and political satire. Last year's event mounted 221 performances in eighteen days. From satirical burlesque to modern dance productions on tap, highlights have included Laurie Anderson's performance art, hip-hop acrobatics, and a Hungarian restaging of Chekhov's "Ivanov."

The two-week-long international **Belfast Festival at Queen's** (October 17th–November 1st) appeals to fans of theatrical drama and comedy, film, the visual arts, poetry, literature, dance, and classical and other varieties of music. Last year's cultural extravaganza featured ninety events in nineteen different locations, including the distinctive Belfast Waterfront Hall and uncommon spaces such as the Spiegel Tent in Custom House Square. Festival dates have included a fancy-dress gathering that invites full audience participation.

Held in Cork City on Ireland's scenic coast, the Guinness-sponsored **Cork Jazz Festival** (October 24th–27th) draws a thousand musicians from more than thirty countries to offer classic, Dixieland, swing, and bebop. Last year's performers included U.S. exports Mose Allison, Jeanie Bryson, Gary Burton, and Phil Woods.

In Northern Ireland, the ghoulish good spirits of the **Derry Halloween Festival** (October 29th–31st) lure young and old to spooky cruises, tours of haunted spots, and massive firework displays. The event culminates in Ireland's largest free street carnival.

Rounding out the cultural season in a spacious new home with an auditorium that has grown to nearly four times the size of its previous venue, the **Wexford Festival Opera** (October 16th–November 2nd) mounts Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov's "The Snow Maiden," Sir Richard Rodney Bennett's "The Mines of Sulphur," and Carlo Pedrotti's comic opera "Tutti in Maschera."

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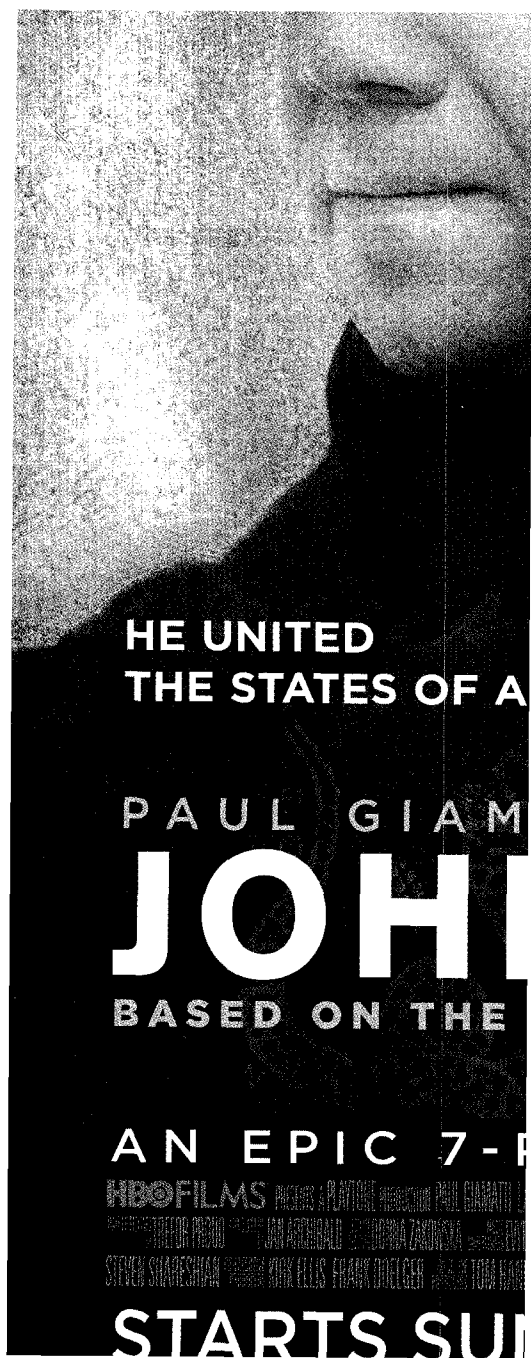
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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DERRY HALLOWEEN FESTIVAL © BRIAN MORRISON/TOURISM IRELAND; GALWAY ARTS FESTIVAL © PAULIA HENRIK; ST. PATRICK'S FESTIVAL © JAMES CHILKIN; CORK JAZZ FESTIVAL © JAMES CHILKIN; CORK JAZZ FESTIVAL © JAMES CHILKIN



THIS CASTLE WAS HOME TO THE
BENNETTS
WHO LIVED HERE FOR
THREE NIGHTS LAST WEEK.

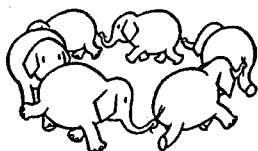
JUST ENOUGH TIME TO LEARN
THE TRUE MEANING OF "ROYAL TREATMENT."





THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT CONDIMENT



Last Tuesday night, after Vermont, Rhode Island, Ohio, and Texas gave John S. McCain the delegates he needed to clinch his party's Presidential nomination, good-fellowship reigned—among Republicans, that is. “Senator McCain has run an honorable campaign, because he’s an honorable man,” McCain’s last serious intraparty rival said. McCain returned the compliment: “I want to commend, again, my friend Governor Mike Huckabee.” McCain does not always use the word “friend” in a friendly spirit; this time, though, he sounded perfectly amiable. The celestial choirs were a little more muffled the next day, in the White House Rose Garden. President Bush, offering the nominee-elect his (somewhat superfluous) endorsement, referred to McCain as “my friend” and himself as “your friend.” McCain, for his part, abjured the “f” word. He did say that he looked forward to their campaigning together, “in keeping with the President’s heavy schedule.” In the eight minutes that remained of the ceremony, the candidate contrived to mention the President’s schedule four more times, always stressing how very busy it must be.

Despite the manifold signs of a perfect Democratic storm this year, Mc-

Cain is in an enviable position. He can get some sleep. He can raise some money. He can watch with interest as Hillary Clinton spends her millions trying to dismember Barack Obama and Obama spends his trying to keep his limbs attached. Meanwhile, he can continue to tack between the two ideological and stylistic identities that have got him where he is today—the rebel and the regular, the Rooseveltian (Theodore) and the Reaganite, the “maverick” and the “conservative”—without veering so far to one side that he forfeits the advantages of the other.

Over the years, McCain has performed this delicate task with some suc-

cess, pairing up positions like Noah bringing animals aboard the ark. He plumped for lobbying reform but has lobbyists running his campaign. He opposed enacting Bush’s tax cuts for the rich but supports extending them indefinitely. He supported a “patients’ bill of rights” but refuses to treat health care as itself a right. He voted against banning same-sex marriage in the Constitution but favors banning it state by state. He once disdained the likes of the Reverend Jerry Falwell (who blamed AIDS on God’s alleged hatred of a “society that tolerates homosexuals”) but now embraces the likes of Pastor John Hagee (who called the Roman Catholic Church “the great whore”). He was for starting the Iraq war but against the way it was being fought; now he’s for the way it’s being fought but against discussing whether it should have been started. There is at least one question, however, to which two answers won’t do.

“WITH MCCAIN ATOP TICKET, TALK SHIFTS TO SPOT NO. 2,” the *Times* headlined the day after Spot No. 1 was definitively filled. According to the accompanying story, McCain has no Vice-Presidential short list and no process for making one, “merely a process to find a process.” Nevertheless, the paper assembled a list of its own, based, one assumes, partly on conversations with persons in the know. At the top: Governors Tim Pawlenty, of Minnesota; Charlie Crist, of Florida; Jon Huntsman, Jr., of Utah; and Mark Sanford, of South Carolina. The “mentioned as well” category included three



ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

former governors: Tom Ridge, of Pennsylvania, and two of McCain's vanquished primary opponents, Mitt Romney, of Massachusetts, and Huckabee, of Arkansas.

What shines through this list of names is the banality of the calculations behind it. All are off-the-shelf conservatives, ranging from the socially mild (Crist) to the fiscally rabid (Sanford, who labels himself "a right-wing nut"). All are white males. All, as governors or ex-governors, compensate for McCain's dearth of administrative experience. Several might help move some battleground state from purple to red. None would disturb the peace—emphatically including the peace of the Democratic Party, if it ever regains it.

This space is usually devoted to pristine moral reasoning, but, hell, it's an election year. Let's get down and dirty. If McCain really wants to have it all—to refurbish his maverick image without having to flip-flop on the panderings that have tarnished it; to galvanize the attention of the press, the nation, and the world; to make a bold play for the center without seriously alienating "the base"—then he can avail himself of a highly interesting option: Condoleezza Rice.

To deal first with the obvious: Rice may be "only" the second woman and the second African-American to be Secretary of State, but she is indisputably the highest-ranking black female official ever to have served in any branch of the United States government. Her nomination to a constitutional executive office would cost McCain the votes of his party's hardened racists and incorrigible misogynists. They are surely fewer in number, though, than the people who would like to participate in break-

ing the glass ceiling of race or gender but, given the choice, would rather do so in a more timid way, and/or without abandoning their party. And with Rice on the ticket the Republicans could attack Clinton or Obama with far less restraint.

By choosing Rice, McCain would shackle himself anew to Bush's Iraq war. But it's hard to see how those chains could get much tighter than he has already made them. Rice would fit nicely into McCain's view of the war as worth fighting but, until Donald Rumsfeld's exit from the Pentagon, fought clumsily. And it would be fairly easy to establish a story line that would cast Rice as having been less Bush's enabler than a loyal subordinate who nevertheless pushed gently from within for a more reasonable, more diplomatic approach.

Rice is already fourth in line for the Presidency, and getting bumped up three places would be a shorter leap than any of the three Presidential candidates propose to make. It's true that her record in office has been one of failure, from downgrading terrorism as a priority before 9/11 to ignoring the Israel-Palestine problem until (almost certainly) too late. But this does not seem to have done much damage to her popularity. In a Washington Post-ABC News poll taken when opposition to the Iraq war was approaching its height, she enjoyed a "favorable-unfavorable" rating of nearly two to one. The conservative rank and file likes her. Though she once described herself as "mildly pro-choice," she is agile enough to complete the journey to mildly pro-life. And she is a preacher's daughter.

Choosing Rice would be a trick. Her failures would be buried in an avalanche of positive publicity for a personal story

as yet only vaguely known to the broad public. (One of the little girls who died in the 1963 Birmingham church bombing was her playmate? We didn't know that!) But the trick would not be an entirely cynical one. Her ascension, though nowhere near as momentous a breakthrough as the election of Obama or Clinton, would be a breakthrough all the same. In this connection, a kind word for George W. Bush may be in order. By appointing first Colin Powell and then Rice to the most senior job in the Cabinet, a job of global scope, Bush changed the way millions of white Americans think about black public officials. This may turn out to be the most positive legacy of his benighted Presidency.

—Hendrik Hertzberg

WORD OF THE WEEK FRONTING



The sixth day of the Sean Bell trial, which is under way in Kew Gardens, turned on sorting the real from the imaginary, or the imagined, in the middle of events that claimed Bell's life in the early hours of November 25, 2006, and upon which hang the fates of three N.Y.P.D. vice detectives. Two of them, Giscard Isnora and Michael Oliver, are charged with manslaughter, and the third, Marc Cooper, is charged with reckless endangerment. The facts in the case are yielding—one major figure is referred to, in testimony, as "the S.U.V. guy"; another, as "the guy in the White Sox hat"—and fraught: fifty shots; no return fire; Bell dead, outside a strip bar called Club Kalua, on the day he was to be married. The case, which is being heard by Justice Arthur J. Cooperman, may come down to two issues: did Bell and his friends, Joseph Guzman and Trent Benefield, say they had a gun, and did the detectives identify themselves as police officers before shooting?

It is a case in which what was said between two groups who have often not understood each other—the police and young black men (although, in this instance, two of the police are young black men)—is crucial. Lawyers parsed

EVOLUTIONARY REPORT CARDS

(E)	
NAME: PEACOCK	
PLUMAGE	A+
THUMBS	D-
CREATIVE WRITING	B

(E)	
NAME: BADGER	
PROTECTIVENESS OF YOUNG	A
ABILITY TO LIVE IN FOREST	A
ABILITY TO LIVE IN NEWLY BUILT SHOPPING MALL	F

(E)	
NAME: HUMAN	
EXOSKELETON	F
PLAYS WELL WITH OTHERS	C
SANDWICHES	A-

MRG

the lexicons of both factions, giving the proceedings the feel of one long, sad municipal-street-life vocabulary drill.

"Do you know what I mean when I refer to a 'light truck'?" Oliver's attorney, James Culleton, asked Lieutenant Michael Wheeler, one of the first officers to respond to the 10-10 (shots fired) call.

Wheeler replied, "Something that would give artificial light to an area so that people could do their work."

Other key words: "Voucher," *v.*, to register evidence by filling out a special form. "Scrip," *n.*, police-talk for "description." "Critical," *adj.*, "It means that his life was in danger and he could die from his injuries," the paramedic who attended to Joseph Guzman testified, when asked to define the word. (Guzman was shot sixteen times.)

Earlier, Hispolito Sanchez, a grave, muscle-bound detective who was part of the botched sting at Club Kalua, took the stand. The day before, he had described witnessing a heated confrontation outside the bar—Bell and Guzman vs. "the S.U.V. guy"—that led him to believe that Bell and Guzman were armed. "Bell said, 'Let's fuck them up,'" Sanchez testified. "Guzman said, 'Yo, go get my gun.'"

On redirect, the prosecutor, Charles Testagrossa, homed in on another term:

TESTAGROSSA: Have you ever heard of the expression "fronting"?

SANCHEZ: In my opinion, "fronting" is when people square off, and they're just not going to do anything.

TESTAGROSSA: So, you could have a gun, you could be going to get a gun, or you could just be, in essence, "fronting"?

SANCHEZ: It's possible, yes.

"Fronting," *v.*, bluffing, posturing, pretending to be something one is not. Putting forth a false identity. It seemed to embody the current moment, one in which the newspapers were full of people who were full of it: an abandoned-baby hoax; a fictionalized diary entitled "The Last Days of Heath Ledger," in *Esquire*; not one but two faked memoirs (Holocaust survivor, gangbanger). "Fronting": the word of the week.

Margaret B. Jones—her real last name is Seltzer—the white Episcopal high-school graduate from Sherman Oaks who claimed to be a Blood from South Central (and, also, for good measure, half Native American), does not use the term "front" in her debunked au-

tobiography, "Love and Consequences." Well, she does, once, but it's in another sense of the word. "I'm know'n. Ima front you this time, but don't neva tell no-one that, aight?" He placed the powder in my hand like a salvation, like a pastor handing out Communion," she writes, of a drug dealer who supposedly spotted her some cocaine that she could cook into crack in order to pay her family's water bill.

Jones's street dialect is the most egregious since Warren Beatty's in "Bulworth," but she demonstrates the poseur's zeal for imitation. Asked, in a promotional handout, why she chose to use slang throughout the book, replacing 'c's with 'k's ("statistiks," "kool," "konsequences"), she replied, "I want people to understand how deep-seated the hatred really is between CRIPs and Bloods. CRIPs celebrate C-days rather than B-days (birthdays) and Bloods smoke bigarettes not cigarettes."

Fronting, it turns out, is something that also preoccupies Jones. Q: What about kids who try to emulate "gangsta rap culture" in their language and dress? "It's sickening to me," Jones replied. "They see it on TV and that's what they've come to respect but it's not real. The rappers rent the million-dollar chains and the fancy cars. Half their tattoos are fake."

—Lauren Collins

THE FOURTH ESTATE JUST LIKE US!



Back in 2005—the era of Britney's marriage to Kevin Federline and Lindsay's turn in "Herbie Fully Loaded"—Janice Min, the editor of *Us Weekly*, argued that even smart, well-informed people need a "safe place," free from hard news. But in 2008—as Lindsay emerges from rehab, and Britney from the psych ward—Min has had a change of heart. For the past month, *Us Weekly* has been breaking political stories: Hillary Clinton mocked her fashion faux pas in a photo spread ("It's not my fault: It was the '60s"); Camille Paglia called Clinton's put-on victimhood "a disgrace" in an exclusive interview; Barack

Obama posed for a "Stars—They're Just Like Us!" campaign edition. (From New Orleans: "When is hot sauce an appropriate condiment? Barack... says, 'Absolutely always.'")

"I've always said that celebrities are like politicians, in that they need the public to support them to stay in office," Min said the other day. "An unloved celebrity is no longer a celebrity." Min was



Janice Min

sitting in her office, wearing a black Michael Kors suit with baubly buttons. She had stayed up late the night before watching the primary returns. "I'd noticed that there's an incredible interest in what's going on with the Democratic nomination," she said. "You look back to when Kerry was running—it was hard to get much enthusiasm mustered up. But it became pretty clear to me that the *Us* audience is also following these two candidates, who have a lot of star power. You go to dinner with friends and the conversation goes from Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton to Britney. They are a legitimate part of—for better or worse—the celebrity orbit."

It was time for work: the editors' weekly issue-planning meeting. Min walked next door to the office of Elizabeth Betts, her creative director, and settled down on a couch, tucking her legs underneath her. The editors sat in silence, typing on their Treos. After a minute, Catherine Romano, an executive editor, looked up. "I don't understand the viewing-party idea," she said, referring to a concept pegged to an episode of the MTV series "The Hills."

"We're not doing it this week," Lara Cohen, the news director, said.

"I like the idea of the Royals," Romano said.

"Ugh. No," Min said. "What else do we have?"

"Richest Babies," someone said.

"What This Tattoo Means."

"There are a million people involved in the U.N.," Romano said. "How about an activism story?" Michael Steele, an executive editor, asked, "Should we build our own fake U.N., with celebrity heads and titles?"

Min suggested that it might be time to assign a spring-break story. "Should we do a bikini countdown?" she asked. Then she was quiet for a second, biting an unpolished fingernail. It has been rumored that sometime during her childhood in suburban Colorado—before she moved to New York and became a *People* writer—she had wanted to cover politics, perhaps become a White House correspondent. ("Yeah," she admitted. "When I was in junior high, I was the annoying kid in the class who always had the answer to whatever current-events quiz was going on. It's definitely a side of me.")

Min glanced at an update about Patrick Swayze's health problems on her Treo, and reviewed a note from a reader who had been given a makeover ("Can we run the original letters? They're so sweet"). She thought of an illustration for the Richest Babies piece—"Giant baby with a crown on its head, and a scepter. We have to show Barron Trump"—and mapped out the new issue: "Definitely 'Idol.' Definitely bikini makeovers. Definitely babies." At the end of the meeting, Min asked her staff, "Don't you feel like spring is almost here? Like, I feel there's hope in the air." She thought for a second and added, "I didn't know Huckabee was from Hope, Arkansas. Did you know that?"

Someone had a great idea for a "Hills" feature: a photo map showing how everyone in the world is connected, in some way, to the cast of the show. Cohen rattled off one potential thread: "Brody, Kim Kardashian, Kristin Cavallari, Nicole Richie, Frankie Delgado. You could go so far out. You could get—"

"Joan Didion! Padma Lakshmi!" Min said. She seemed to like the idea. "Barack Obama!"

—Lizzie Widdicombe

THE ARTISTIC LIFE LAST LECTURE



Rosamond Bernier, the world's most glamorous lecturer on art and high culture, makes her farewell appearance at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on March 13th, and end-of-era emotions are running high. Bernier, with her long gowns and her impeccable diction, managed to transform the slide lecture into something all her own—a performance, a star turn, a piece of theatre. Since 1971, when she gave a series of talks on four modern masters (Matisse, Picasso, Léger, and Max Ernst, all of whom she had known), she has played the Met nearly every year. She has talked about artists and writers, couturiers and impresarios, collectors and cities, and her two hundred and fifteen Met lectures have always been highly personal affairs. Formalist art critics, who can't bear what she does, have been obliged to admire her staying power. "You can really talk to anyone about anything if you're interested in it yourself," Bernier, who is ninety-one, said last week.

Her final lecture at the Met is about "my life in the French couture," she said. She arrived in Paris in 1946, a newly minted fashion editor for *American Vogue*. "Life there was very difficult," she recalled. "Very cold. The couture was just beginning again after the war, and it was revitalizing the French economy. I had no idea what I was supposed to do, no training at all." Before long, she was sending *Vogue* interviews with Picasso, Matisse, and Miró. "It was sheer recklessness," she said. Years later, Alexander Liberman, the magazine's art director at the time, remembered her as being "the way some people are who are timid, in that she could also be very daring."

Bernier lived in Paris for more than two decades. She left *Vogue* in 1950, and married a French journalist named Georges Bernier. Together they started *L'Œil*, a monthly, whose motto was "*Tous les arts, tous les pays, tous les temps*." When the Berniers divorced, in 1970, Rosamond returned to New York. After an uncharacteristic period of misery, she reinvented

herself as a lecturer. Bernier has lectured at many museums, here and abroad, including (in French) the Centre Pompidou, the Grand Palais, and the Louvre. "The Society of the Four Arts, in Palm Beach, has had me back fifteen times," she said. "Of course, people have nothing to do in Palm Beach. I've also done a lot of cruises, because they take me places I want to go. I'd always wanted to go to Angkor Wat, and about ten years ago one of my cruise ships ended up in Hong Kong. The American government had issued a warning for Americans to keep out of Cambodia, but I thought, To hell with that. I flew to Phnom Penh, and then went to Siem Reap, and because it was meant to be dangerous nobody was there. I'm so glad I did that, because I went back recently, and it was heartbreaking. Grand hotels, and swarms of people."

Will she continue to lecture elsewhere, after her Met finale? "I'm doing one in April at the Century Club, on the various studios Picasso had in Paris, from the ramshackle Bateau Lavoire to the petit-bourgeois one in the Eighth Arrondissement—different spaces, different lives, and seven different live-in companions. I might do a few more after that, but not many. I don't like to be away now because of John." John is John Russell, a former art critic for the *Times*, whom Bernier married in 1975. Since his retirement, she says, her job has been to make his life as enjoyable as she can.

Bernier herself seems impervious to time's arrows. "I don't know why," she said. "I eat everything. I drink. I had T.B. as a child, so I've never smoked, but I don't exercise regularly, and I wear the same clothes I had forty years ago. Luck has been a big part of it. When I was at Sarah Lawrence, I went on a trip to Mexico. My father, a lawyer who was on the board of the Philadelphia Orchestra, had arranged for me to go to a rehearsal conducted by Carlos Chávez, and Aaron Copland was playing his piano concerto. Aaron and I became lifelong friends on the spot. There were two other guests at the rehearsal, Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. They said, 'Come on, kid, you'll go with us tonight.' I was dressed in my best outfit, and Frida said, 'That will never do.' She fixed me up in a Mexican skirt, and did my hair in bows and ribbons, and off we went to a night club. What a way to begin!"

—Calvin Tomkins

THE FINANCIAL PAGE WHAT MICROLOANS MISS

Making loans and fighting poverty are normally two of the least glamorous pursuits around, but put the two together and you have an economic innovation that has become not just popular but downright chic. The innovation—microfinance—involves making small loans to poor entrepreneurs, usually in developing countries. It has been around since the nineteen-seventies, but in the past few years it has seized the imaginations of economists, activists, and bankers alike. The U.N. declared 2005 the International Year of Microcredit, and the microfinance pioneer Muhammad Yunus won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006, while celebrities like Natalie Portman and companies like Benetton have become fervent microloan advocates. Even ordinary Americans can now get in on the act, at sites like Kiva.org, where you can make a microloan yourself. (Right now, a clothing vender in Cambodia needs seven hundred dollars to “purchase more clothes to sell.”)

This vogue has translated into a flood of real dollars: institutional and individual investments in microfinance more than doubled between 2004 and 2006, to \$4.4 billion, and the total volume of loans made has risen to \$25 billion, according to Deutsche Bank. Unfortunately, it has also translated into a flood of hype. There's no doubt that microfinance does a tremendous amount of good, yet there are also real limits to what it can accomplish. Microloans make poor borrowers better off. But, on their own, they often don't do much to make poor countries richer.

This isn't because microloans don't work; it's because of how they work. The idealized view of microfinance is that budding entrepreneurs use the loans to start and grow businesses—expanding operations, boosting inventory, and so on. The reality is more complicated. Microloans are often used to “smooth consumption”—tiding a borrower over in times of crisis. They're also, as Karol Boudreaux and Tyler Cowen point out in a recent paper, often used for non-business expenses, such as a child's education. It's less common to find them

used to fund major business expansions or to hire new employees. In part, this is because the loans can be very small—frequently as little as fifty or a hundred dollars—and generally come with very high interest rates, often above thirty or forty per cent. But it's also because most microbusinesses aren't looking to take on more workers. The vast majority have only one paid employee: the owner. As the economist Jonathan Morduch has put it, microfinance “rarely generates new jobs for others.”

This matters, because businesses that can generate jobs for others are the best hope of any country trying to put a serious dent in its poverty rate. Sustained economic growth requires companies



that can make big investments—building a factory, say—and that can exploit the economies of scale that make workers more productive and, ultimately, richer. Microfinance evangelists sometimes make it sound as if, in an ideal world, everyone would own his own business. “All people are entrepreneurs,” Muhammad Yunus has said. But in any successful economy most people aren't entrepreneurs—they make a living by working for someone else. Just fourteen per cent of Americans, for instance, are running (or trying to run) their own business. That percentage is much higher in developing countries—in Peru, it's almost forty per cent. That's not because Peruvians are more entrepreneurial. It's because they don't have other options.

What poor countries need most, then, is not more microbusinesses. They need more small-to-medium-sized enterprises, the kind that are bigger than a fruit stand but smaller than a Fortune 1000 corporation. In high-income countries, these companies create more than sixty per cent of all jobs, but in the developing world they're relatively rare, thanks to a lack of institutions able to provide them with the capital they need. It's easy for really big companies in poor countries to tap the markets for funding, and now, because of microfinance, it's possible for really small enterprises to get money, too. But the companies in between find it hard. It's a phenomenon that has been dubbed the “missing middle.”

The problem is a dearth not just of lenders but also of people willing to buy an ownership stake in companies, like the angel investors and venture capitalists American entrepreneurs often rely on. Microfinance has led us to focus on lending, but it can be hard for young companies to get big purely on bank loans, which consume cash flow that could be reinvested in the business. Supplying the missing middle will require backers who want to invest in companies rather than just lend to them. There's been some progress on this front of late; three weeks ago, Google.org, the Soros Economic Development Fund, and the Omidyar Network announced that they are setting up a firm in India that will invest only in small-to-medium businesses. But there have yet to be celebrities speaking up for the missing middle.

Both socially and economically, microloans do a lot of good, working what Boudreaux and Cowen call “Micromagic.” But the overselling of their promise has made us neglect the enterprises that could be real engines of macromagic. The cult of the entrepreneur that the microfinance boom has helped foster is understandably appealing. But thinking that everyone is, and should be, an entrepreneur leads us to underrate the virtues of larger businesses and of the income that a steady job can provide. To be sure, for some people the best route out of poverty will be a bank loan. But for most it's going to be something much simpler: a regular paycheck.

—James Surowiecki

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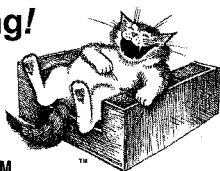
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THE POLITICAL SCENE

THE IRON LADY

The Clinton campaign returns from the dead, again.

BY RYAN LIZZA

To watch Hillary Clinton during the final two weeks of the Ohio and Texas primary campaigns, as she defiantly ignored the pronouncements of her political demise and pounded away at her opponent in one more interview, at one more rally, was to bring to mind Jason or Freddy Krueger or the sitting governor of California, those Hollywood cyborgs and zombies who, despite bullets and stakes and explosions, will not under any circumstances be vanquished. Clinton's public performances were marked by an eerily unflappable persistence as she executed an ungentle two-pronged attack: raising doubts about the readiness of her young opponent, Senator Barack Obama, to be Commander-in-Chief and challenging the depth of his commitment to the bread-and-butter concerns of the middle class. On February 25th, during a foreign-policy speech at George Washington University, she surrounded herself with six military men, including General Wesley Clark, himself a former Presidential candidate, and Major General Antonio M. Taguba, who forthrightly investigated the abuses at Abu Ghraib prison, to the despair of the Pentagon leadership. Clinton attacked Obama from both the right (he would naïvely grant a Presidential audience to the world's dictators) and the left (he would unilaterally attack terrorist enclaves in Pakistan). The charges might have been, at best, a distortion of Obama's positions, but they were surely meant to paint him as unschooled and unseasoned—Barack the Unready.

Part of the way through her fusillade, Clinton broke into a spasm of coughing—much of the campaign entourage of aides and press had been battered with the flu and other transmittable ailments—and then, briefly, she lost her voice. The audience fell silent. For a dramatic moment, it was unclear if she could continue. But Clinton righted herself and struggled through some

lines about Darfur without losing her place. It was as if she had managed to suppress the coughing through sheer will. An aide slipped in from the side and handed her a cough drop, which she discreetly popped into her mouth during a burst of applause.

Two days later, aboard Clinton's chartered campaign plane (she took off in a blizzard from Cleveland and was on to Columbus), she spoke in the aisle, while reporters, some pinned against tray tables by overeager cameramen who had leaped over several seats to get a good angle, crushed in around her with their recorders. The plane began its descent, careering toward the runway. Oblivious of airline regulations, Clinton continued ticking off her anti-Obama lines: "What I feel is happening is that people are turning toward the big questions that they should have to answer in this campaign. You know, who can be the best Commander-in-Chief, who do you want in the White House answering the phone at 3 A.M.?" (The line was straight from a new Clinton television spot, in which a telephone is heard ringing, ominously, at three in the morning—a spot that belonged to a half-century tradition of scare ads involving red telephones and mushroom clouds.) The landing gear dropped, but Clinton was on to the subject of the subprime-lending crisis and home foreclosures. "Many of you are homeowners. Home values in America have dropped one-point-six trillion dollars in the last year. So everybody's wealth is disintegrating."

The runway came into view. A voice on the intercom demanded that passengers sit down and fasten their seat belts. Clinton, though, continued standing and talking calmly about why she was staying in the contest. "We're now raising on average a million dollars a day on the Internet. People have just been, you know, really rallying to my candidacy." Reporters glanced nervously out the

window, but never for an instant did Clinton turn away from the cameras, lose her train of thought, or allow the imminent landing to interrupt the full ventilation of her talking points. Seconds before touchdown, an aide steered Hillary Clinton back to her seat.

Unlike Hubert Humphrey, Al Smith, or even her husband, Hillary Clinton on the campaign trail has never been able to project the image of the happy warrior. There is now, and has always been, a certain joylessness in her bearing. She has been trying to make discipline a selling point since her first "listening tour" of New York State, in the months before she ran for the United States Senate—a device designed to portray tireless commitment to voters suspicious of her carpetbagging and celebrity. After landing in Columbus, the campaign entourage headed by motorcade to Zanesville, a town of about twenty-five thousand, sixty miles away, for what was billed as an economic "summit." The ninety-minute conversation among Clinton and fourteen politicians and business and labor leaders, and Ohioans with hard-luck stories, had all the drama of a Senate committee hearing. Some no doubt found the discussion riveting, but at one point the former Ohio senator and Mercury astronaut John Glenn, a panelist, was either very deep in thought about college loans, or fast asleep. Scores of audience members

were similarly benumbed and fled the event before it was over. But Clinton seemed confident about the electoral power of relentless policy tedium. It was as if the sheer display of iron-pantsed discussion would further underscore her insistent theme: the hollowness of Obama's charisma. When one speaker offered encomiums to Clinton rather than economic prescriptions, she gently reprimanded her, saying, "We're going to put a moratorium on compliments." Then, with the bonhomie of a high-school health teacher, she turned the

conversation back toward government programs to help people "quit smoking, to get more exercise, to eat right, to take their vitamins."

Endurance is the unseen requirement of a successful candidate. Even round-the-clock cable coverage does not quite convey the drumming repetition of a campaign, and Clinton, for all her weaknesses, is a master of this punishing, incessant rhythm. Unlike



Hillary's strength has been in refining the art of attack.

Obama, who can seem recessive when he tires, she is intent on masking the fatigue. Even on primary day, Clinton kept at it. She spent the morning in a Houston studio, taking part in twenty television interviews reaching every major market in Texas and Ohio. Clinton was methodical. In every Texas interview, as if for the first time, she patiently mentioned her military endorsements and the work that she did thirty-six years ago in George McGovern's Presidential campaign, registering Latino voters in south Texas. (This last

seemed ironic, considering that the Clinton campaign wants to portray Obama as a twenty-first-century McGovern—too soft, too naïve, and destined to lose in November.) In every Ohio interview, she raised what, in the last week of the campaign, had become a potent anti-Obama issue: the discrepancy between his public criticisms of the North American Free Trade Agreement and an Obama adviser's alleged assurances to the Canadian government that the candidate's sharp rhetoric was merely primary-season politics. "Senator Obama came to Ohio and said one thing about NAFTA, and then had a foreign government told something else," she told a Dayton radio station. Her message control was interrupted only when another prolonged coughing fit forced her to take a break during a chat with a Corpus Christi station. Her break did not last long.

Later that morning, the campaign moved to the parking lot at the J. P. Henderson Elementary School, a polling place in a heavily Hispanic corner of southeast Houston that had been transformed into a tiny set. Salsa music filled the air, about a dozen smiling Latino children were brought in, and Clinton's motorcade soon rumbled toward the school. Accompanying the candidate was a somewhat eclectic entourage: the actor Ted Danson, who wore an Irish tweed hat; his wife, the actress Mary Steenburgen, an

Arkansan and longtime supporter of Bill and Hillary Clinton; Clinton's soigné aide-de-camp, Huma Abedin, who was recently profiled in *Vogue* and currently was wearing a bright-orange sweater and black boots that shimmered in the sunlight; and Anthony Weiner, the wiry Brooklyn congressman and aspiring mayor of New York. Clinton's eyes widened at the sight of the children, and with a cue from a staffer they began to chant, "Hill-ar-ee! Hill-ar-ee!" Clinton bent and talked to a little girl in a black cowboy hat.

The photographers swooped in for the picture of the day.

The press corps following Clinton had grown in recent days, but not for reasons that pleased the campaign. Like Vatican reporters who travelled with John Paul II less to hear his homilies than to report the details of his senescence, these reporters came, at first, for the political deathwatch. Bill Clinton himself had told Texas voters that if Texas and Ohio did not come through for Hillary, the campaign was probably finished. At the time, this seemed like further evidence that the former President had lost his political ear, that he had become more a walking minefield than an asset to his wife. But by primary day, as Hillary Clinton's resolve to stay in the race became clear, the mood in the media mob had shifted. "We have come to bury Hillary, but we may end up praising her," Tom Baldwin, of the London *Times*, said. And Mark Penn, Clinton's portly and unloved chief strategist, told me, speaking of Obama, "We broke his momentum completely. That's why, when I went to sleep Monday, I could say every single poll had moved in one direction—towards us."

By this point, Clinton had begun to see that all the work aimed at derailing Obama had paid off. As the Latino

children continued their chant, she smiled and said, "I feel really good about today."

Later that night, at Clinton's victory party in Columbus (she won the Ohio primary with fifty-four per cent of the vote), Terry McAuliffe, the chairman of the campaign and an unflaggingly high-spirited supporter of both Clintons, indulged in an impromptu wet-told-you-so session. He taunted reporters for their eagerness to write off Clinton's prospects. "We came back in New Hampshire, Nevada, Super Tuesday," he said. "And we're doing it again tonight." After a long string of defeats for the Clinton forces, this was her moment of triumph. Just after MSNBC put a winning check mark next to Clinton's picture, projecting her victory in Ohio, a young female volunteer did a joyous dance with friends. "Hell yeah, baby!" she shouted. "Eat it, Barack! This is a woman's world!"

McAuliffe's agitated recap of the campaign left out some unignorable facts. He ignored that Super Tuesday, on February 5th, had widely been considered a draw. (Obama won thirteen states, Clinton won nine, and Obama emerged with a lead of more than a dozen delegates.) Nor did he mention that before March 4th Obama had won

eleven straight contests—twelve counting Vermont, which he had won a few hours earlier. (Clinton was also about to win in Texas, by a margin of 51–47.) But all of these results had presented the Clinton campaign with an arithmetical dilemma. In the remaining dozen primary contests, which include the March 8th Wyoming caucus and stretch to the South Dakota primary, on June 3rd, Clinton needs to win by huge margins in order to overcome the more than hundred-delegate lead that Obama still enjoyed after March 4th. By that calculation, Clinton could reach the number of delegates needed to secure the nomination only by appealing to the so-called superdelegates—elected and Party officials who aren't bound by actual voting in the primaries and caucuses. Would it be acceptable, I asked McAuliffe, for the superdelegates to overturn the results of the popular vote?

"You keep trying to contend the nomination is over tonight!" McAuliffe replied loudly and happily, pointing and waving his arms. "I'm telling you we have twelve states to go. Don't tell me about the popular vote. You call me in June and then talk to me about it. We don't know where we're going to be. We have a lot of states. I don't want you disenfranchising all these great states coming up.... Why don't you like these people?"

The next day, a Clinton adviser was more candid about what lies ahead. "Inside the campaign, people are not idiots," she told me. "Everyone can do the math. It isn't like the Obama campaign has some special abacus. We can do these calculations, too. Everyone recognizes how steep this hill is. But you gotta keep your game face on."

For Clinton, it will be vital in the weeks ahead to maintain the public perception that she can still win. If the Obama campaign's strength has been its grassroots organization—he built his delegate lead by winning in far-flung caucus states that Clinton ignored—the Clinton campaign's strength has been in refining the art of attack. Its war room is staffed by a team of men and women who consider themselves heirs to the celebrity operatives of Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign—in particular, James Carville, Clinton's campaign manager, and George Stephanopoulos, his communi-



"Everybody thinks we're sisters, but we're actually mother and son."

cations director. Until recently, Hillary Clinton's communications team, led by Howard Wolfson, a pugnacious operative who has been with Clinton since her first Senate campaign, and the equally combative Phil Singer, a former aide to Senator Charles Schumer, was not always impressive. Through January and much of February, the campaign never quite settled an internal debate about how aggressively to attack Obama. In public, Hillary shifted from deferential ("I am honored to be here with Barack Obama") to confrontational ("Shame on you, Barack Obama!"). In debates, she seemed almost to experiment with attack lines, few of which seemed spontaneous, and Obama was deft at arguing that the attacks on him were examples of "old politics." Meanwhile, the press corps seemed uninterested in any sustained anti-Obama focus, writing more about the history he was making rather than the political corners he might be cutting.

By early February, Clinton's campaign seemed to be flailing. On one day, she accused Obama of plagiarizing part of a speech (actually a few lines borrowed at the suggestion of an Obama friend, the governor of Massachusetts), on another of reneging on a campaign-finance pledge (which would have applied only to the general election). In a series of debates (twenty in all, for anyone counting), Clinton kept accusing Obama of advocating a health-care plan—not very different from hers—that she insisted failed to insure fifteen million Americans. None of these arguments slowed Obama's victory streak, which started on February 9th with wins in Louisiana, Nebraska, Washington, and the Virgin Islands.

The Clinton campaign finally succeeded in tripping up Obama as reporters began to raise the questions put to them in daily conferences by the war-room managers: Why, as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's Subcommittee on European Affairs, had Obama never held a hearing about NATO's role in Afghanistan? And, come to think of it, what *was* the full nature of Obama's relationship with Tony Rezko, his onetime fund-raiser and friend, who happened to be on trial in Chicago for extortion, money laundering, and fraud? There was also that curious business

with the Canadians. Was it true that Obama's top economic-policy adviser, Austan Goolsbee, had told someone at the Canadian consulate that Obama was not entirely serious about renegotiating NAFTA? The Clinton campaign acted utterly shocked by this possible revelation. (Never mind that in an interview last year Clinton told me that the problem with NAFTA was "not necessarily the framework" but "the way that it was implemented and enforced.")

The attacks were working. Last week, Penn told me, "If you look at the Gallup tracking poll, we moved even after just a few days of opening a couple of basic questions on him. So it really shows that he's much weaker as a potential nominee." (The poll in question showed Obama leading nationally 50–42 on the Saturday before primary day, and the race tied, 45–45, three days later.)

The newfound strength of Clinton's war room is vital for her going forward. Her campaign realizes that if it is unable to overcome Obama's lead in pledged delegates, there may be only one other path to victory: to make the case to superdelegates—and the Party establishment—that Obama could not defeat John McCain in the general election, and that, therefore, the will of the voters should not be binding. Mark Penn has been trying to make that argument for weeks, but few paid attention while Obama was winning. (How could the Illinois senator be unelectable if he was on his way to being elected?) But people are listening now, despite polls consistently showing that Obama does better than Clinton in a head-to-head race with McCain.

Penn, regardless of the success of his tactics, has become a lonely figure in the Clinton campaign. "Mark Penn does not have many friends," one Clinton adviser told me when I asked which camp in the notoriously balkanized Clinton campaign he represented. But Penn has the two friends that matter: Bill and Hillary Clinton, who have relied on his instincts and wisdom since he was brought into the White House with Dick Morris after the Republicans, led by Newt Gingrich, took control of Congress in the 1994 midterm election. Hillary Clinton wrote in her autobiography that the weeks after that defeat

were "among the most difficult of my White House years" and she "wondered how much I was to blame for the debacle: whether we had lost the election over health care." But with help from Morris and his protégé, Mark Penn, President Clinton saw his approval ratings rebound, and by the fall of 1996, after Morris resigned in the wake of his own sex—or, to be precise, toe-sucking—scandal, Penn had taken charge of Clinton's successful reelection campaign. In 1998, Bill Clinton's affair with the White House intern Monica Lewinsky was disclosed, and by that time Penn's place in the Clinton circle of friends, enablers, and strategists was fixed. He gave advice to the President throughout his impeachment ordeal and to Mrs. Clinton as she recovered from public humiliation. Penn served as the chief strategist for her successful 2000 and 2006 Senate campaigns. More than any other senior adviser, Penn has guided both Clintons through their most treacherous political troubles—and has encouraged Hillary Clinton's almost unnerving survival instincts.

Penn's poll-defying arguments about Obama's electability against McCain will be pressed ever more forcefully as both campaigns move to the dénouement of the primary season. From Penn's standpoint, Obama's freshness is his greatest vulnerability. "The G.O.P. attack machine redefines the Democratic candidate," Penn said recently. "It's formidable. It commands a vast media network. And it has been able to skew the perceptions even of such distinguished public servants and well-respected Democrats as Al Gore and John Kerry, creating impressions of them very quickly that were out of step with reality." Hillary Clinton, he went on, "has withstood the full brunt of this kind of attack and will be able to neutralize what is likely to happen, particularly with the nominee who is not as well known through public life."

Clinton is stressing in all her appearances—another point that Penn sees as essential—that Obama will appear distinctly weaker on national-security questions in relation to McCain. (This infuriates Obama's supporters—after all, he alone among the surviving candidates opposed the invasion of Iraq.) The Clinton campaign will also press the claim

that Obama will not be able to withstand heightened scrutiny of his domestic-policy views. The implication is that Obama is unacceptably liberal, while Clinton, despite the similarity of her positions and voting record, is not. "How much do Independent voters really know about Barack Obama, his voting record, and his past positions?" Penn asked recently. "Certainly less than Democrats know. In a general election the Republicans would spring into action, and quickly, if he were the nominee, roll out his full record. And the kind of Independent support that you see in places like Idaho would consequently evaporate."

Penn pushed this idea last week when he told me, "People want to have a nominee that's going to win. So a lot of the things they accepted initially may not hold up. Independent and Republican support is diminishing as they find out he's the most liberal Democratic senator"—a reference to recent rankings by the *National Journal*. "As they get more of a sense that he's not ready to be Commander-in-Chief, a lot of Independents who were supporting him are disappearing."

This electability argument—that Obama can be easily caricatured, that he's weak on national security, that he's too liberal—is not so very different from the Republican case against Obama, although the charges might be more damaging coming from a member of one's own party, especially in a bruising campaign that may last until the Convention this August in Denver. It is tempting to say that the Clinton campaign's plan is to burn the village in order to save it—that Hillary Clinton believes that Democrats, hypnotized by Obama, are making a historic mistake from which only she can rescue them. And it is tempting to add that this means the political destruction of the man who is still most likely to be the Democratic nominee.

Clinton's victories and her rhetorical tactics have challenged Obama's principled refusal to play the rough-and-ready game which he brands "old politics." Her disingenuous remark on "60 Minutes" that Obama was not a Muslim "as far as I know" was especially galling. One foreign-policy adviser, the professor and author Samantha Power,

betrayed a taste of the Obama campaign's anger at Clinton when she told *The Scotsman* that Clinton was "a monster. . . . The amount of deceit she has put forward is really unattractive." (Power, who also writes for *The New Yorker*, apologized and resigned from the campaign last Friday.)

But perhaps this prospect of a grueling endgame is not as destructive as it sounds. The attacks on Obama, and Obama's counterattacks on Clinton, have been mild compared to some heard in recent elections. (Before the Iowa caucuses in 2004, a Democratic group ran an advertisement that showed an image of Osama bin Laden with a voice-over saying, "Howard Dean just cannot compete with George Bush on foreign policy." Robert Gibbs, the spokesperson for the group, is now Obama's communications director.) At the end of last week, Obama was accusing Clinton of hiding her finances, and the Clinton campaign was comparing Obama's accusations to those of Kenneth Starr, the independent counsel who investigated Bill Clinton during the Lewinsky scandal, and whose very name, among Clintonites, is synonymous with villainy.

There are two unsettled questions about Obama that a final, bitter counter-offensive from Clinton may help answer: Does Obama have the toughness required to beat John McCain, and, more important, to serve as President? And can Obama attract some of the key swing groups—especially white working-class Democrats and Latinos—who have been drawn to Clinton but are open to voting for McCain? The purpose of primaries, after all, is to answer such questions.

Clinton may be criticized for staying too long in the race and for attacking Obama in ways that his supporters will consider nefarious and desperate. But no one is entitled to a Presidential nomination. As ugly as it looks now—and as ugly as it is likely to become—if Barack Obama becomes the Democrats' nominee, he may thank Hillary Clinton for making him a better candidate. ♦

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GHOST WRITER

Pat Barker's haunted imagination.

BY KENNEDY FRASER

As a little girl, the novelist Pat Barker felt quite at home in the company of ghosts. She was taught to treat them politely. She grew up in a gritty industrial town in northeast England, in a family that practiced Spiritualism as their religion. She came across some of the family's Sunday-school textbooks, years later. "Did you know that astral beings have no anus?" she said, when I met her in England this winter. She hooted with laughter. "That is one of the many useless facts that clutter up my mind!" Barker was born in 1943, a child of the Second World War, but her circumstances made her a survivor of the First World War as well. Her family had very little money. She was brought up in the home of her grandmother and her grandmother's second husband, who had served in the battlefields of northern France and had been bayoneted in his side by a German soldier. He was also profoundly deaf, which made it hard to talk to him about anything. The child would stare at his scar as the man, stripped to the waist, stood washing himself at the kitchen sink; sometimes, like St. Thomas, she put her fingers in it. But how he came by the wound, like every other aspect of his horrific wartime experience, was never mentioned.

He was the forerunner: the first of all the silenced, traumatized, physically damaged veterans—living spectres—who would inspire the "Regeneration" trilogy, the masterpiece that Pat Barker was to produce in the nineteen-nineties. (It won her the Booker Prize, and an international reputation.) With her new book, "Life Class," she puts the First World War at center stage again—especially as it affects a group of youthful artists, who are struggling to survive, resist, or represent it. Even her female-centered, social-realist early novels—"Union Street" (1982), "Blow Your House Down" (1984), and "Liza's England" (1986)—had ghosts in them, of

one sort or another. In "Liza's England," the title character's husband was wounded in the throat in an action that killed most of his comrades. He has nightmare visions of their faces rising out of the earth, and, as a Spiritualist medium, devotes his energy to channelling their voices.

Spiritualism was popular with the British working classes after the First World

the fireplace. "As metaphor—and similes are trivial, but metaphors go to the heart of what human beings are—there is absolutely nothing wrong with the idea of ghosts haunting the living," Barker said. "It is simply a statement about our relation to the past, and to the parts of the past we haven't managed to cope with. I thank the Lord I grew up in a setting like that."

Barker lives in the ancient cathedral city of Durham, some thirty miles from her birthplace, in Thornaby-on-Tees. Her husband, David Barker, is a retired professor of biology and neuroanatomy at Durham University. (The couple have a grown son and daughter, both married, and three grandchildren. Their daughter, Anna, has just completed her



Barker grew up surrounded by voluble women and silent, war-damaged men.

War. "A lot of the impetus was this horrendous grief and denial that nearly a million dead in a country produce," Barker said. She recalled that an uncle of hers lived in a house where a door would swing open for no apparent reason: "You had to say, 'You're welcome.'" All the family believed it was a poor woman who had gassed herself, walking across the room to

second novel. "I wish she had chosen an easier profession," her mother says.) When I went to Durham to meet Barker, the drive took me through starkly contrasting topography. First I crossed the moors, stretching away with eerie light on their midwinter khaki coloration, and with, here and there, the burial mounds of Bronze Age chieftains. Then I dropped



"You have logic, I have Roscoe."

down from the heights and through the industrial landscape around the mouth of the River Tees: the country that witnessed the birth and death of the Industrial Revolution. Even now—with the remaining chemical factories wrapped in pipe-work like their own intestines, the huge, sullenly puffing cooling towers, the perpetually flaming waste-gas chimneys against the backdrop of a cold gray sea—Teesside remains an exhilarating, though vaguely infernal, vista. But it is a postindustrial relic, a doomed shadow of the muscular, self-confident place where Pat Barker was born, at a time when factories and steel mills ran round the clock, and the Luftwaffe guided their bombs by the glow of the blast furnaces.

Barker is protective of her privacy, and has been known to complain about critics who seek a facile key to her art through biographical detail. We met by arrangement not in her home but in a featureless hotel in Durham. Anyone who has read her novels will be aware that Barker is an expert observer of two people talking, listening, or being together in a room in silence. The engine driving the "Regeneration" trilogy is the therapeutic encounters between Dr. William Rivers (a psychiatrist and anthropologist who really existed) and his patients—Army officers suffering from different forms of shell shock. His patients include the real anti-

war poets Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, who play secondary parts in the plot as it unfolds, leaving the starring role to a fictitious officer called Billy Prior. A "temporary gentleman," with an aspirational working-class mother, he is a complex, amoral, seductive, and knowing antihero: a man defiant of boundaries of class or sex. Once he recovers from his mutism (he lost the power of speech around the time when he came to in a trench holding a dead man's eyeball), he is by far the trickiest of Rivers's patients. He challenges Rivers by drawing attention to the analyst's stammer and suppressed childhood memories, and he calculates what Rivers wants to hear by observing the dilation of his pupils.

Barker, creator of this shape-shifter ("There's a lot of Billy Prior in me," she says), is surprisingly direct and candid in manner. In a way, she reminded me of the Northern women in her novels, chatting as they scrub floors, iron clothes, or sit knee to knee in factories making ammunition, boxing up sponge cakes, or plucking chickens. But her identity is far from simple. With her air of plain living and high thinking, her long, intelligent face devoid of makeup, and a rather provincial haircut, she looks like a Cambridge don or the wife of a Hampstead intellectual. Her speech is that of the educated middle class anywhere in Eng-

land, except for traces of the lengthened vowels of her birthplace. Her tall, slightly gawky figure retains something of her adolescent self, as well.

Before she took up full-time writing, she was a teacher of young adults. She still misses working side by side with colleagues. "But I choose not to have a community of writers," she said. From her relatively isolated vantage point, away from the London literary scene, she has staked her claim to a literary territory of ambitious range. She has published eleven novels covering more than a century of English history, from 1900 to the present. (She is a trained historian, who took her degree at the London School of Economics.) She defies categorization; she once said that she didn't write historical novels, since for her the First World War was history that we had not "come to terms with." Nevertheless, she is part of a generation of English writers that the writer and editor Ian Jack once described as creating a "literature of farewell," fascinated by a "country and people that seemed to be there a minute ago, before we blinked and turned away." However modest her childhood circumstances, Pat Barker grew up in a nation that was a great world power and then (like Teesside) experienced a dizzying decline.

With the exception of her student days, she has lived all her life in the North-east. It was chance, she says, the result of having married someone who happened to work in Durham. But she admits that the rootedness has served her well in one way, at least. "If you want a broad spectrum of characters, some of them are not going to be speaking Standard English," she says. "I am not very good at dialects other than the one I was brought up in." A decade before she resurrected Rivers to heal the stuttering and silenced officers, Barker channelled an astonishingly life-like world of working-class women who seemed never to stop talking.

It was the novelist Angela Carter, in a writing workshop that Barker took when she was in her thirties, who encouraged her to set aside her apprentice stories of polite and educated people and focus first on the earthy, tight-knit, sometimes brutal milieu where she had spent her girlhood. In the terraced houses with outdoor plumbing and coal fires, everyone heard through shared walls when a man came home from the pub and beat

his wife. A woman had only to rattle the fireback with the poker to summon help from next door when her waters burst and her labor was starting. The children ("bairns" in the North Country tongue) were born and raised, as the dead were mourned, collectively.

Here is Liza, grieving for her son, killed in the Second World War:

Her body performed the familiar tasks, but her mind was lost in a white land. Fields of snow broken only by the footprints of small animals, animals that you never saw, but only heard or felt, pitter-pattering along, somewhere close behind.

When she could bear it no longer, she went out and walked up and down the street, head bowed, arms folded across her body. The neighbours let her alone, though they were always aware of her, pausing in their washing of bedroom windows or looking up from the front doorstep as she passed. Then somebody would go to fetch Mrs Dobbin and she would run out and put her arms round Liza and lead her back to the house. "Howay in, love," she'd say. "Look, it's gunna rain."

From the outset, Barker demonstrated compassion and psychological insight, and a formidable literary technique. Her plots have elements of the murder mystery or the psychological thriller, with mercurial shifts of narrative viewpoint from one character to another and from a character's interior monologue to godlike omniscience. She explores the consequences of violence, whether between nations or within the deceptive coziness of home. She is by turns bawdy, lyrical, and cinematic. She is not afraid of the gothic. "I am interested not just in right and wrong but in good and evil," she says. "And in innocence and experience—an entirely different thing, but also fascinating." With "Blow Your House Down," she turned an unblinking eye on a community of working-class women who had resorted to prostitution and become the prey of a killer based on the real-life nineteen-seventies murderer known as the Yorkshire Ripper. Even in this Dostoyevskian *roman noir* of women on the edge—vulnerable on wet night streets, in boarded-up houses, and under railway arches—there are variants of class distinction. In "Union Street," most people were poor, but some were clean and respectable, while others were rough or merely common.

"Class gets in, if you're an English writer," Barker said. "You almost can't avoid it." It hadn't occurred to her, until some readers pointed it out, that

"Life Class," the title of her latest novel, might be seen as an allusion to the class system. But certainly she was interested in the Slade School of Fine Art (one of the book's settings, along with the gruesome wards of a field hospital and a little Belgian town adjacent to the front), partly because in 1914 that famous institution was one of the few places in England where social classes mingled. "You had aristocratic girls like Lady Diana Manners, using it as part of their 'finishing,' and also very poor working-class Jewish boys from the East End, who were trying to do the whole thing on tiny scholarships and weren't getting enough to eat," she said. In Barker's own life, the first cross-fertilizing encounter with a culture wider than her family's came when she won a place at a local all-girls grammar school. Her grandmother tried to keep up with the books she brought home, until the homework was Latin or algebra and the gulf irreparably widened. Her step-grandfather could sign his name, but he couldn't read. His illiteracy, like his war, was an unmentionable topic. He used to sit in his armchair pretending to read a newspaper.

Pat Barker grew up with silent, wounded men. "And with talkative women, spinning stories," she said. "Stories with bits missing." She is a true war baby. "My mother was in the Wrens"—the Women's Royal Naval Service—"and her stories about World War Two were always quite intriguing. She used to run home through an air raid, because she knew her mother would be worried. It was a very dangerous thing to do, but I'm afraid that wouldn't occur to my mother. She really adored the war. She was one of those women whose lives were expanded by the experience of it. She was on this huge mixed-service base, and there were lots and lots of young men. One of whom was my father! But her stories stopped short of revealing which one."

To the end of her mother's life, Barker never got to the bottom of it. She thinks now that her mother had no idea who he was.

"I would try to get her to speak about it, but she would just invent whatever

she thought I wanted to hear. What happened was that she had fallen very deeply in love with a marine, who was travelling on a submarine—or a ship, I'm not sure which—that was blown up and sunk. The girls she was in a hut with persuaded her—to pull her out of it—to go out drinking, and she got absolutely plastered. There's no doubt that what was in her mind was this man she had really loved, and who was still, to the end of her life, a significant figure. And the man she met that night and had sex with was an insignificant figure, except for the fact that she got lumbered with me." There was a silence. "It's almost like being begotten by a ghost," she added.

When her mother died, eight years ago, Barker found a photograph of the marine hidden under the cloth on her mother's dressing table. "I'm sure there were times when to console herself she persuaded herself that I was this man's child. But I definitely wasn't." She has kept the photograph; it would mean nothing to anyone else in the family, but it means something to her. "The man who ought to have been my father."

Her pregnant mother had to leave the Wrens and go back to live with her mother and stepfather, and the man with the bayonet wound was hardly eager to share his home with the young woman and her infant daughter.

"I was not allowed to cry, as a baby," Barker said. "Not because they were stupidly fond of me, but because he would have raised the roof if he'd had a crying baby in the house. I was actually

hidden in a cupboard once. My grandmother told me the story. My grandmother and my mother were so ashamed of this thing. When my step-grandfather's relatives came round—they were posh, you see, several notches up the social ladder—I was actually hidden, asleep, put upstairs. My existence was not mentioned."

She was fifteen when her step-grandfather died. "He was a very nice old man, really. He grew to love me. On his deathbed, he called for me continually. Didn't want anybody else. I remember holding his hand. He wanted me to pull him up. He kept saying, 'Pull! Pull!' He'd had a very bad hemorrhage, but



doctors didn't respect patients then—didn't tell you what was wrong, if you had cancer. He said, 'It's the bayonet wound, isn't it?' and they said, 'Yes.' He ended his life thinking the bayonet wound he'd had as a young man had finally got him."

When Barker was seven, her mother left home to marry a man who had also been in the First World War, dispatched to the front as a boy of fifteen. In later years, he had a paralyzing stammer and an uncontrollable temper. Barker stayed behind with her grandmother. Her mother's new household included a son from her husband's previous marriage, to a woman who had died when he was an infant. "My stepfather had a violent, explosive temper where that boy was concerned," Barker said. "He would get him on the floor and kick him. My mother would try to intervene and get kicked herself. At fifteen, this tall, strong, but deranged boy was sent into the Army, which considerably trained him to kill and then sent him home again. He had a startlingly active criminal career. I remember going to two prisons with my mother—there were many more prisons, but there were two I went to with her—and these awful conversations would take place. My mother, who had a great sense of drama, would make pleas to him to go straight. They were each of them in a B movie. Which was, at the same time, sincere. She really tried very hard with that lad."

Barker recalled having a varied life, going between the two households, but she stayed with her mother only for short periods. She was a witness to violence, but not its victim. "My grandmother would have asked questions if I'd come home with bruises," she said.

Readers who have known only the *Rear* trilogy, with its historical sweep and its close examination of relationships between men (not excluding the homoerotic), may be surprised to learn that Pat Barker has written extensively and sympathetically about women and children. Barker seems compelled to shift focus, take risks, and evade formulaic expectations. It's as if she were intent on denying readers the satisfaction of placing her too exactly.

After the first three books, writ-

ten from an array of generally feminine viewpoints, she published a little jewel called "The Man Who Wasn't There" (1989). It is written from the viewpoint of a twelve-year-old boy, fantasizing about his emerging manhood and yearning for an absent father. Part of the novel is an affectionate parody of a nineteen-fifties movie script. Something set Pat Barker free around this period. Perhaps it was writing from the viewpoint of a boy and then (with the great antiwar trilogy) from the viewpoint of such a range of different men. She said once that the male viewpoint was like asbestos gloves, which let her handle themes that might otherwise be too painful. After the trilogy, she took another leap, this time into present-day England: "Another World" (1998), "Border Crossing" (2001), and "Double Vision" (2003) evoke the traumas of the world in the recent past—September 11th, the funeral pyres of foot-and-mouth-afflicted livestock, the real-life abduction and murder of a toddler by ten-year-old boys. Danger always lurks, even when prosperous educated people are living in delightful village settings.

To balance the hovering, anatomically challenged astral beings, Barker never lets us forget that we all are part of the animal kingdom. Sweat, mucus, semen, urine, and—most of all—blood lap at her characters. Babies come swooshing into the world on floods of blood, young men in foreign fields and old men in their beds at home leave the world on wine-dark clots and ruby-colored gurgles. Sex, for the most part, has been far from romantic: a predatory man violates a child with a penis like a "purple toadstool"; couples rut against the wall of alleys strewn with dog turds and used condoms; but-tocks gleam in the shadows of public parks on hastily spread raincoats. Sex often ends in unwanted pregnancies. It is evidence of Barker's confidence as a novelist, her tenacious pursuit of her identity and her moral truth, that she will revisit almost identical scenes from one book to the next, seeing them from a different angle or giving them a different outcome. A mother leads a teen-age daughter to a filthy old abortionist and they see things through to a ghastly conclusion; a mother takes

her daughter to the abortionist, with her dirty fingernails and "stockings drooped round her ankles, like the folds of an elephant's backside," and then changes her mind, making way for the birth of a granddaughter who will be the love of her life. The decision comes to her, in the dingy pub where the trio have met, as a regenerative union between herself and nature:

This was as far as she could come and still remain herself, but her self seemed a small, weak creature, a skin to be sloughed off and left behind. Soil closed round, cool and dense, nourishing the roots of hair. Wind moved in her branches. Her fingers, resting on a beer mat, were twigs bursting into leaf. . . . "Howay, Eileen, we're going home."

All experience has tendrils, all relationships are multilayered: between men and women, children and other children, mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, history and the present, the living and the dead. Human beings are mystics; human beings are brutes. Animals, in Barker, can pad onstage with telegraphed messages from the spirit world, for good or ill. If Liza's husband, Frank, was a Spiritualist medium, speaking in the voices of dead soldiers, her parrot is a medium, too. She got this numinous, moth-eaten, foulmouthed old bird from a friend who got him from a sailor. The sailor abandoned the bird because it got on his nerves:

"He'd been kept in the mess, you know, and he used to imitate all the lads' voices, and of course. . . . A lot of the lads were dead."

Bloody hell, thought Liza, looking into the cage. *It's Frank.*

"He used to say it reminded him of the mates he'd lost. He got so his nerves couldn't stand it. But I used to say to him, that's not right, you know. You *have* to remember. You *owe* it to people to remember."

When, at last, in "Life Class," Barker portrays attractive and heterosexual young people making love to each other in private in a warm bed, happily sharing the pleasures of the flesh with no fear of getting pregnant, the scenario is positively shocking. It is startling, too, at least in the first half of "Life Class," to see our genteel reflection in the mirrors of the Café Royal, table-hopping with these same people, and hobnobbing with "Gus"—Augustus John, the painter. (Later chapters take us back to war, to the familiar hell of mud, blood, and gangrene.) Barker introduces a triangle of young people: Paul Tarrant,

another hybrid from a working-class family on Teesside, but with a property-owning grandmother who left him some money; Kit Neville, brought up in an Edwardian world of cooks and nannies but with a painting style already evolved and more modern, by light-years, than those of his contemporaries; and Elinor Brooke, a girl from a family straight out of Forster or Saki, but committed to her integrity as an artist and her freedom as a woman. She resists any sort of glorification of war by those at home on the sidelines. War, she says, is "a single bullying voice shouting all the other voices down." Lady Ottoline Morrell takes up the young woman, and invites her to her tea parties.

I told Barker how surprised I was to find her, of all people, here on the fringes of Bloomsbury.

"I'm going to *stay* on the fringes, I've decided!" she said, laughing. She talked about Elinor (who is based, in part, on Dora Carrington, and has echoes of Lily Briscoe in "To the Lighthouse") in the same protective, maternal tone she had used about her daughter, Anna. "I was very tempted to introduce Virginia Woolf, simply because what Elinor feels about the war is very close to what Virginia Woolf says in 'Three Guineas,' but Elinor can't articulate it. That's infuriating. All you would need, to make it clear, is Virginia smoking a cigarette after dinner and Elinor sitting, as the Slade girls used to sit, more or less like ornaments on the mantelpiece, and thinking, Yes, that's what I feel."

Virginia Woolf was not invited into "Life Class," largely because she trails too much of her own myth: "You can't fictionalize a character who has already become fiction." Barker is no Bloomsbury groupie ("Not in the least!"), but she is fond of Virginia Woolf's diaries. Woolf's nephew Julian Bell died young, fighting in the Spanish Civil War. "That summer after he died, she was walking across the Sussex Downs, having long, passionate disputes with him. He'd gone off and died in a war, in spite of his Bloomsbury inheritance, crippling and devastating his mother. The family went into both wars already grieving for a dead young man: Thoby"—Thoby Stephen, Virginia's older brother—"before the First World War, and Julian

before the Second World War. They almost pre-experience what's going to come for others."

She went on, "In the end, I think about war from a very feminine perspective. In all my books, there's a great emphasis on the long-term damage to the individual and to the family. There are male carers, for veterans, but the overwhelming burden of caring for someone who will never be the same again falls on women. I've always been aware of the psychological damage inflicted on families, sometimes not clearing for several generations." Many people have told her that "Regeneration" helped them understand broody and volatile fathers and grandfathers who had cast a shadow on their households.

I asked her whether she thought that everyone could be redeemed, whether damage to a family could be arrested.

"I think it can," she said. "And I don't think it necessarily requires profession-

als. It requires someone to do something very, very creative with the materials of everyday life. A lot of ordinary people are capable of that."

Her own accomplishments have clearly required something more. "I'm quite *determined*," she said. "Probably a bit driven. It's silly, but I never knew what my father's name was, and I never had the same name as the people I was living with until I married my husband. In a horrible sort of way, 'making a name' was perhaps more of a drive than it should have been."

I asked her what she thought her mother and her grandmother had given her.

Her face lighted up. "Oh, I think a delight in language," she said. "They each had that. The fun of telling stories. A great sense of humor. A sense of continuity—creating a home base in not very easy circumstances. And a great sense of biological meaning." ♦

SNOW WHITE AND HER SEVEN PEOPLE

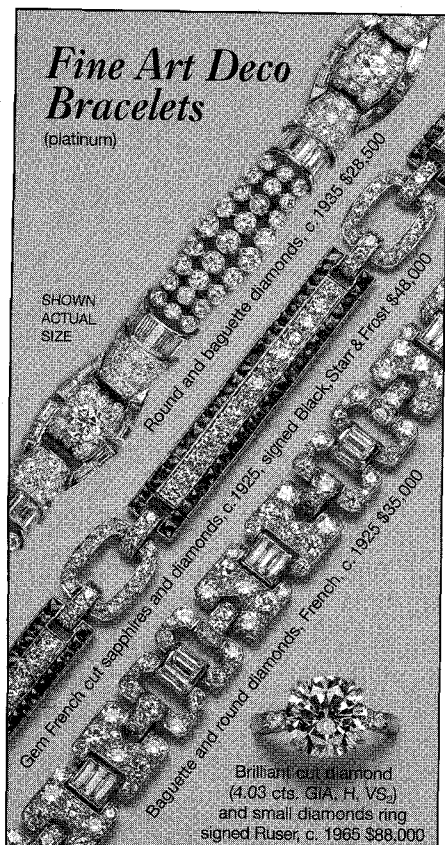


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SENATOR HOTHEAD: THE McCAIN QUIZ

BY PAUL SLANSKY

1. What did Richard Kimball, John McCain's opponent in his 1986 Senate race, do during a debate that got McCain so upset that, according to his aide Jay Smith, he "wanted to kill" Kimball?

(a) He pointed out that McCain had referred to the retirement community Leisure World as "Seizure World."

(b) He revealed that McCain was standing on a riser behind his podium.

(c) He said, "I'm not the one who left his disabled first wife so he could marry a rich young beer heiress."

2. Who is Harry Jaffe?

(a) The writer who first called McCain "Senator Hothead."

(b) The journalist who helped break the 1994 story of Cindy McCain's addiction to Percocet and Vicodin, which led her to steal pills from a relief organization she'd founded.

(c) The reporter whose question prompted McCain to respond that he was "fine" with a hundred-year U.S. military presence in Iraq.

(d) The politician who said of McCain, "His volatility borders in the area of being unstable. Before I let this guy put his finger on the button, I would have to give considerable pause."

3. What prompted Jon Stewart, on "The Daily Show," to ask, "Has John McCain's Straight Talk Express been re-routed through Bullshit Town?"

(a) McCain decided to speak at Jerry Falwell's Liberty University six years after calling Falwell and Pat Robertson "agents of intolerance."

(b) McCain claimed that the Confederate flag flying over the South Carolina capitol symbolized "heritage," although he was on record as having called it "a symbol of racism and slavery."

(c) McCain said of George W. Bush, "I support him. I am grateful to him. And I am proud of him."

4. Which of these statements about McCain is true?

(a) He used to be against Bush's tax cuts and for overturning Roe v. Wade, but now he's for extending the tax cuts and against overturning Roe v. Wade.

(b) He used to be against allowing illegal immigrants to earn citizenship, but now he's for it.

(c) He used to be against Bush's tax cuts and overturning Roe v. Wade and for allowing illegal immigrants to earn citizenship, but now he's for extending the tax cuts and overturning Roe v. Wade and avoids talking about illegal immigrants earning citizenship.

5. McCain told workers at a gun factory, "I will follow Osama bin Laden to the gates of Hell and I will shoot him with one of your products." How did he later clarify this declaration?

(a) "Of course, I didn't mean the literal gates of Hell. I don't even know where they are."

(b) "I shouldn't limit myself to your products, because, when I find him, I may not be carrying a gun made by you."

(c) "I certainly didn't mean I would actually shoot him. I am certainly angry at him, but . . . I would not shoot him myself."

6. Two of these statements refer to Bush. Which two refer to McCain?

(a) At thirteen, he yelled "Fuck this" when he played golf poorly, prompting his mother to make him go sit in the car.

(b) In keeping with his nicknames Punk and Nasty, he appeared in his high-school yearbook wearing a trenchcoat with a turned-up collar and with a cigarette dangling from his lips.

(c) As a toddler, if he didn't get his way he'd hold his breath until he fainted.

(d) When he was a boy, he liked to blow up frogs with firecrackers.

7. True or false: When Chelsea Clinton was eighteen, McCain told this joke:

"Why is Chelsea Clinton so ugly? Because Janet Reno is her father."

To whom did McCain say what?

8. Edward Kennedy.

9. John Cornyn.

10. Charles Grassley.

(a) "Shut up."

(b) "Fucking jerk."

(c) "Fuck you."

11. What was McCain referring to when he told reporters, "It's up to you to find that out, kids"?

(a) The extent of the Bush campaign's involvement in rumors that McCain had fathered a half-black child.

(b) The financial connections between Cindy McCain and Charles Keating, the man behind the nation's biggest savings-and-loan collapse.

(c) Why he condemned the 2004 Swift Boat Veterans ads smearing John Kerry, then hired the agency behind them.

Who said what about McCain?

12. Pat Buchanan.

13. Sylvester Stallone.

14. Senator Thad Cochran.

(a) "I like McCain a lot. . . . There's something about matching the character with the script."

(b) "He will make Cheney look like Gandhi."

(c) "The thought of his being President sends a cold chill down my spine."

15. Last year, McCain said, "When I voted to support this war, I knew it was probably going to be long and hard and tough, and those that voted for it and thought that somehow it was going to be some kind of an easy task, then I'm sorry they were mistaken." What did McCain say before the war started?

(a) He told Larry King that "success will be fairly easy."

(b) He told Wolf Blitzer, "I believe that we can win an overwhelming victory in a very short period of time."

(c) "It's a safe assumption that Iraqis will be grateful to whoever is responsible for securing their freedom."

(d) All of the above.

Answers: (1) b, (2) a, (3) a, (4) c, (5) c, (6) b and
Answers: (7) True, (8) a, (9) c, (10) b, (11) b, (12) b, (13) c, (14) d, (15) a

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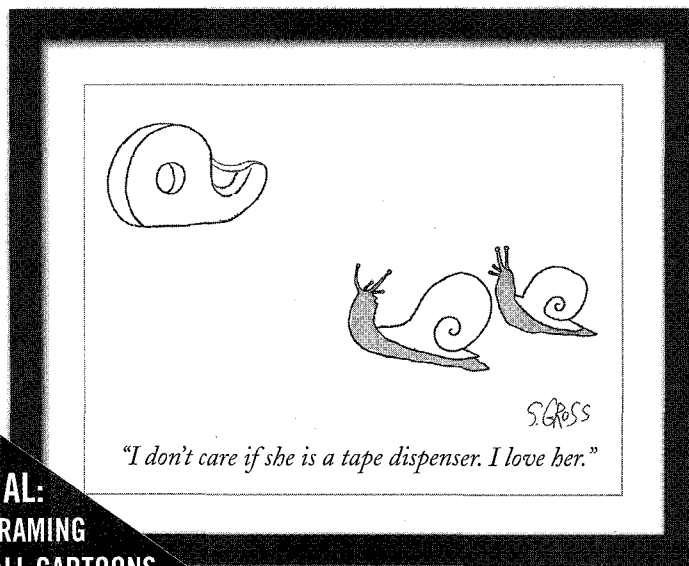
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Auschwitz 21.6.1944.

A REPORTER AT LARGE

PICTURING AUSCHWITZ

What does a recently found photo album reveal?

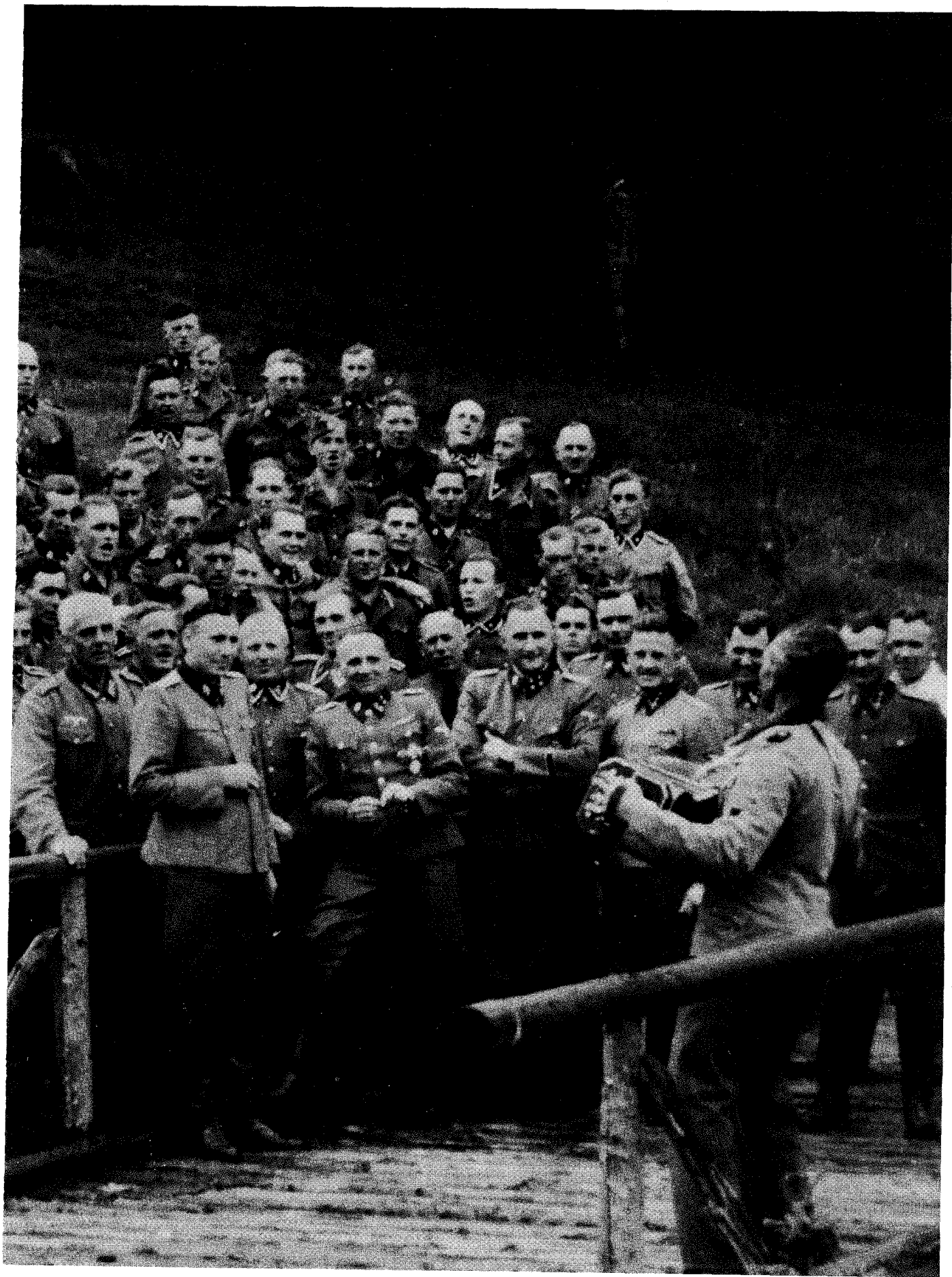
BY ALEC WILKINSON

In June of 1945, after the war with Germany had ended, an American Army officer arriving in Frankfurt was told to look for a place to live within a part of the city which the Allies had enclosed with barbed wire. He found an abandoned apartment and did what he could to make it livable. Opening a closet door, he discovered an album of photographs. It had thirty-one pages, and a hundred and sixteen black-and-white images, the bulk of them a little smaller than a playing card, nearly all of them portraying German officers—at a picnic, at shooting practice, at a resort among fir trees and hills, at the dedication of a hospital, dressed as miners and visiting a coal mine, at a dinner at a long table with a white tablecloth and wine bottles and waiters, lighting candles on a Christmas tree, at a funeral in the snow where the coffins are draped with Nazi flags.

Eventually, the officer returned to the United States. He took a job with the government, in Washington, D.C., and he and his wife lived in Virginia. They had no children, and she passed away about ten years ago. In December

of 2006, the officer, elderly, and disposing of his possessions, wrote a letter, with the help of a friend from his church, to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, in Washington, offering it an opportunity to look at the album. According to what he could read of the captions, he wrote, the images appeared to depict “activities in and around Auschwitz, Poland.”

His letter was delivered to Rebecca Erbelding, an archivist, who is twenty-six and has worked at the museum for five years. Erbelding examines nearly all texts and photographs offered to the museum. People send photographs frequently; they find them among a late relative’s possessions. The most common are liberation photographs—scenes from concentration camps set free by the Americans or the British. They were usually made by Army photographers, and given to soldiers so that they could take them home and show what they had seen. Erbelding assumed that the album consisted of these, and that, given the abundance of them in the museum’s collection, she would recommend another home for it. Erbelding also



ith his adjutant, on the album's first page; and officers at a retreat near the camp—Rudolf Hoess and Josef Mengele are in the front row.

assumed that the officer was mistaken about Auschwitz.

Auschwitz, in southern Poland, was the largest of the Nazi concentration camps. It enclosed fifteen square miles and was divided into three parts: Auschwitz I contained the camp offices; Auschwitz II, also called Birkenau, contained the gas chambers and the crematoriums; and

Jacob album, for the young woman who found it, it is now at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem. In addition, there are three photographs, at the Auschwitz Museum, of bodies being burned and women being sent to the gas chambers, which were taken clandestinely, probably in August or early September of 1944, by inmates with a cam-

wasn't possible to remove them to see if anything was written on their backs, and the paper was too thick to X-ray. Some of the pictures had captions, carefully lettered in black ink on a black line drawn with a straight edge, but the chronology was erratic, and the narratives were interrupted, suggesting that the album had once come apart, and



The selection ramp, in the Jacob album. The officer with his back to the camera, holding a cane, is identified as Emmerich Hoeker.

Auschwitz III had a synthetic-rubber-and-oil factory, operated by forced labor. Auschwitz was also the camp where the most people died, approximately 1.1 million. There was a photography studio, where portraits were made of certain prisoners, but, except for official purposes, such as documenting construction or a dignitary's visit, photography was forbidden; what went on at Auschwitz, as in all the camps, was regarded as a state secret. There was only one album known to portray life at Auschwitz, and it came to light years ago. Originally, it included about two hundred photographs, made on May 26, 1944, depicting the arrival of a train of prisoners and their dispersal. Often called the Lili

era apparently discovered among the belongings of arriving prisoners.

Nevertheless, Erbelding asked the officer to send her the album. It arrived in the middle of January, 2007. Erbelding, who has a round face, blue eyes, a small mouth, a sharp nose, and brown hair, works with several other archivists in a windowless room in the basement of the museum. She unwrapped the album on a table. It had no cover. The leaves, held together by three brass split pins, had been speckled and spotted by water and bugs. A few of the images had stains on them, too—the officer had kept the album in his basement. After sixty years, the photographs remained fixed to the page so effectively that it

had been put back together haphazardly. The American officer, who asked to remain anonymous, couldn't remember if he had changed the order or not. He died in July, 2007, never having said why he had kept the album to himself for so long, but the reason appeared to have been that he had not recognized anyone in it and so did not think it was significant.

Pasted to the first page is a studio portrait of two officers. The caption reads, in translation, "With the Commandant S.S. Stubaf. Baer, Auschwitz 21.6.1944." Stubaf. stands for *Sturmabführer*, a rank equivalent to major. Baer's first name was Richard; he was thirty-two in the photograph, and he was the commandant of

COURTESY YAD VASHEM/USHMM

Auschwitz from May, 1944, to January, 1945. The second man was not identified. O.K., Erbeling thought, the pictures are of Auschwitz.

She took the album upstairs to Ron Coleman, a reference librarian to whom she likes to show new artifacts that strike her as unusual. The photographs are so small that it is difficult to make out the faces in them, especially those of people who are not in the foreground. Erbeling says that she and Coleman were looking at a photograph of four officers, when, "Suddenly, I said, 'Oh my God.'" Amid the group stood Josef Mengele, the doctor who had conducted experiments on prisoners, often on children, and particularly on twins. Mengele was never caught; after the war, with the connivance of family and friends, he had lived mostly in South America, for a time rather cynically as José Mengele, and in 1978, while swimming in the ocean, he drowned. At Auschwitz, he was often among the doctors on the ramp, the place where the trains stopped and the passengers were selected for death or for work, depending on the doctors' impression of them. Prisoners sometimes called Mengele the Angel of Death, because being selected for his experiments meant at least not dying immediately.

"I started looking more closely in the album, and he shows up eight times," Erbeling told me. "These eight photographs are the only photographs we have of Mengele at the Auschwitz complex, and when I say 'we' I mean the world. That's when we really started trying to figure out who everyone else was."

Erbeling next took the album to Judith Cohen, the director of the museum's photographic-reference collection. Cohen's office has walls of binders to the ceiling—a catalogue of most of the museum's archive of nearly eighty thousand images (which includes six of Mengele). As they sat at a table and turned the pages, looking now with a magnifying lens, Cohen recognized two other figures. The first was a small, chubby, bald man wearing a suit: Carl Clauberg, a doctor who performed sterilization experiments on women, using acid. Clauberg appears, with a number of other doctors, at the opening of the hospital. He was tried by the Soviets, in

1948, and sentenced to twenty-five years in prison. He was released early and arrested again, by the Germans; he died in 1957, awaiting his second trial. "He's someone I remembered precisely," Cohen said. "He's baby-faced and smiling—he looks like the family pediatrician." The second figure was Rudolf Hoess, who had supervised the building of Auschwitz and had been its commandant from May, 1940, to December, 1943. In 1947, he was sentenced to death at the first Auschwitz trials, which were held in Poland, and was hanged at the camp, the last person to be killed there.

No photographs had ever shown Nazis at leisure at Auschwitz, but in the album Hoess appears with Mengele at a retreat in the hills called Solahütte, a place that neither Erbeling nor Cohen had heard of.

A colleague of Erbeling's, Raye Farr, who is the director of the museum's film and video archives, found a reference to Solahütte in *Auschwitz Chronicle*, a compilation of the camp's daily records, which says that on August 18, 1944, "SS Private Johann Antoni and SS man Hans Kartusch from the 3rd Guard Company of Auschwitz II receive eight days' special leave in the S.S. recreation center of Solahütte as recognition for the successful use of their weapons during the escape of four prisoners, in spite of darkness." Solahütte lay just beyond the camp's border. It was a long, lodgelike building above the Sola River, which flowed past Auschwitz I; it is now a tavern.

The photographs at Solahütte are the most transparently provocative, partly because they are so strange and partly because of the notoriety of the figures they contain. There are twenty-nine images, divided between two occasions, one involving officers, and the other involving officers and young women. From a book on Nazi uniforms, Erbeling and Cohen determined that the women weren't guards, as they thought they might be. They were typists, telegraph clerks, and secretaries in Auschwitz I, and were called *Helferinnen*, which means "helpers." Their racial purity had been established—should an officer be looking for a girlfriend or a wife, the *Helferinnen* were intended to be a resource. In some pictures, the women re-

cline on canvas deck chairs with the officers; one of them holds a little boy. In a series of photographs, the women and three officers run toward the camera, grinning wildly, apparently because it has suddenly begun to rain; the caption says, "Rain coming from a bright sky." Another series shows twelve *Helferinnen* in wool skirts and cotton blouses sitting on a terrace railing. One officer is playing the accordion. Another walks down the row of young women with a tray, serving them bowls of blueberries. (The caption says, "Here there are blueberries.") In the next pictures, the women and the officer eat the berries. The limp hand of an officer in a deck chair appears in the foreground of one picture, as if he were conducting the accordion player. Finally, the women and the officer turn their bowls to the camera; some invert them to show that they are empty. One woman pretends to weep. The scene took place on July 22, 1944. Erbeling pointed out to me that on July 23rd the Soviets liberated Majdanek, the first concentration camp to fall. Majdanek was about a hundred and eighty miles northeast of Auschwitz. When the camp was abandoned, a thousand prisoners were force-marched to Auschwitz. Only half of them arrived.

The most surreal of the Solahütte photographs shows nearly a hundred officers arrayed like a glee club up the side of a hill. The accordion player stands across the road. All the men are singing except those in the very front, who perhaps feel too important for it. They include Rudolf Hoess; Richard Baer; Otto Moll, the head of the gas chambers at Auschwitz II; Josef Kramer, the commandant of Auschwitz II and later of Bergen-Belsen (these are the only photographs of him at Auschwitz); Franz Hoessler, the commandant of the women's camp at Auschwitz II; Walter Schmidetzki, who was in charge of the area in Auschwitz II where prisoners' belongings were rifled for anything valuable; and Josef Mengele.

The man posed with Baer on the first page of the album appears more often in it than anyone else, and, apart from one photograph of Baer, he is also the only person to appear alone. Erbeling assumed that the album belonged to him—that he had measured the borders

and lettered the captions—but no one at the museum recognized him. In one photograph, with a wand like a pool cue, he lights the candles on a Christmas tree. In another, he stands facing the lens in his summer uniform, a little wilted, his sleeves rolled. In several images, he plays on a lawn with his dog, a German shepherd named Favorit. He marches troops to a target range, and then, lying on a wooden platform about the height of a table, shoots a rifle. (“The shot was a twelve,” the caption reads.) With other officers, he hunts rabbits with shotguns in the snow. He is the one who serves the *Helperinnen* blueberries. In the portrait with Baer, half of his face is in shadow, his cheeks are full, and he looks young to be an officer. He is gazing distractedly ahead, as if his mind were wandering when the shutter closed.

Erbelding, Cohen, and Joseph White, a researcher at the museum, surmised that the visit with Baer to the photographer’s studio had been made to commemorate a promotion. (They were able to deduce that the portraits had been taken at the Auschwitz studio, because if Baer had left the grounds a note would have been made of it in the camp records.) They learned that five men had been promoted to the rank of *Obersturmführer* on June 21, 1944. At the National Archives, in College Park, Maryland, they searched through the S.S. records seized after the war. A number of officers’ files include a photograph. Two men on the list were missing theirs. One was the head of a guard-dog unit. “We figured that the people in the photographs were too important for the head of a guard-dog company to be associating with,” Erbelding said.

The other man, Karl Hoecker, was Baer’s adjutant. He had arrived at Auschwitz in May, 1944, with Baer, and remained there until it was abandoned, the following January. Hoecker was tried, in 1963, at the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials—in which the German government prosecuted twenty-one men who had evaded the first trials, in Poland—and Erbelding found a photograph of him among the defendants. In her office, she held the trial photo-

graph next to pictures from the album. “Twenty years have passed,” she told me, “and now he wears glasses, but, if you look at the bottom of the ears, he has a wide lobe and a very fleshy bottom of the ear, he has the same full lips, his facial creases are similar, his brow ridge is similar, and he’s wearing his hair parted the same way, although it has receded quite a bit. He’s fifty-two in one picture, and thirty-two in the other.”

Hoecker was born in Engerhausen, Germany, in December, 1911, the youngest child of six. His father, a bricklayer, died in the First World War, leaving his family impoverished. Hoecker worked at a bank, then joined the S.S. in 1933, and got married five years later. (He and his wife eventually had a daughter and a son.) At the beginning of the war, he was drafted into the S.S. Fighting Corps, and in 1940 he was sent to work at Neuengamme concentration camp, near Hamburg. In 1942, he was transferred to Majdanek, where he was adjutant during the Harvest Festival of November, 1943, when all the Jews from three camps, including Majdanek, were assembled and shot, in order to prevent uprisings. Forty-two thousand prisoners were killed in two days.

Baer and Hoecker worked at Auschwitz I. Rudolf Hoess, in “Death Dealer,” a memoir he wrote after his arrest, noted that the adjutant “has a special position of trust. He must insure that no important event in the camp remains unknown to the Commandant.” Auschwitz II and III

had their own commandants, who were subordinate to Baer. A few days before Soviet troops liberated Auschwitz, in January, 1945, Hoecker and Baer fled to Germany, where Baer was made commandant of the Dora-Mittelbau camp, and Hoecker was again his

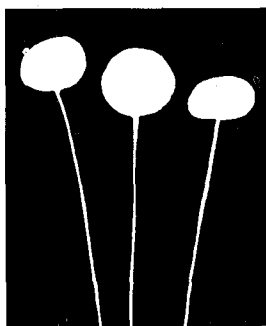
adjutant. When that camp was liberated by American troops, in April, Hoecker and Baer followed the advice of Heinrich Himmler, the head of the S.S., which was that S.S. officers insinuate themselves among the troops, in the hope of being taken for ordinary soldiers. Hoecker joined a fighting unit that was captured by the British in northern Germany. He spent a year and a half in a P.O.W. camp,

and was released, apparently because no one recognized him—the description the British had of Hoecker made him out to be smaller and slighter than he was.

If the album consisted only of photographs of people who hadn’t been seen at Auschwitz, and of areas of Auschwitz that hadn’t been portrayed, or if it merely expanded the photographic record of the camp, it would be valuable historically—it would place notable individuals among each other and inspire speculation about character and relationships, and associations could be made and conclusions drawn and further research stimulated—but it has an enhanced value. In the fifty-four days between May 15 and July 8, 1944, a period partly covered in the Hoecker album, and called the Hungarian Deportation, four hundred and thirty-four thousand people were put aboard trains to Auschwitz—so many people that the crematoriums, which could dispose of a hundred and thirty-two thousand bodies a month, were overrun, and bodies were thrown into pits dug by prisoners and set on fire. The Holocaust scholar Michael Berenbaum described 1944 to me as the year in which “Auschwitz became Auschwitz.” Before, it had been merely one of several death camps in Poland.

Karl Hoecker arrived at Auschwitz on May 25, 1944. Lili Jacob, who found the other photo album, arrived at the camp as a prisoner a day later. Judith Cohen was the first to realize that the two albums overlapped, and that all those prominent men portrayed at Auschwitz in the American officer’s album—and, perhaps, particularly Hoess—were there to assure that the killings of so many people were carried out efficiently. Approximately seven thousand men and two hundred women oversaw prisoners at Auschwitz between 1940 and 1945. Almost all the women and sixty-five hundred men survived the war; roughly eight hundred were convicted. Many managed to disappear into civilian life. Cohen began to wonder if the two albums, seen side by side, might reveal information that the prosecutors had not been aware of.

Lili Jacob was eighteen when she arrived at Auschwitz from Bilke, Hungary, a town that was surrounded by potato



A CLEAN SLATE

Each morning I worked up spit
Aimed at my slate and wiped
Shirttail from corner to corner

Each day was a clean start
Born again and born *big-so*
As grownups loved to say

The day before disappeared
Somewhere between
My saliva and Terylene shirt

The new day promised
Something hitherto not
Seen or guessed about

A cobweb not there
The previous twenty-four hours
That overnight dew reveals

"A" for aubergine
Known to us as *balanjay*
"B" for bat for playing cricket

Until I filled the slate
With slant text my left hand
Told my right-side brain was new

Coins on the sea pressed by light
This morning sky wiped of stars
Chalk off my shirt climbing sun

—Fred D'Aguiar

fields and pinewoods. She had five brothers. Her father was a horse trader who did well enough that the family had a live-in maid. Germany invaded Hungary in March, 1944, and in April all the Jews in Bilke were ordered to the yard of the synagogue and then sent to a ghetto, where they slept on the floor of a brick factory. One morning, they were put on the train to Auschwitz. The trip took three days. When they got off, Jacob said, the smoke from the crematoriums made everyone sick.

Jacob spent six months in Auschwitz. Late in 1944, she was sent to Dora-Mittelbau; Baer and Hoecker arrived there the following January. In April, she was in the camp hospital, ill with typhus, when she and the other patients heard music, and noises from a crowd,

and left their beds to see what was happening. On the street, she saw American soldiers, and then, weak from starvation and the typhus, she collapsed. Two friends took her to an abandoned barrack, and put her to bed. She began to feel cold and, looking for something to cover herself with, opened a drawer in a nightstand. In the drawer was a pajama jacket, and under the jacket was the album. Jacob testified at the Frankfurt trials that when she opened the album she realized that it was of Auschwitz. "I recognized a picture of the rabbi who married my parents," she said. "And as I was leafing through, I recognized my grandparents, my cousin, even myself." She appeared among hundreds of women, in front of a long, low shack that was the kitchen.

The women are in rows, more than twenty of them. Jacob was in the front row, in the center of the page. Like all the women, her head had been shaved. Another photograph depicted two anxious-looking boys in winter coats and peaked caps by the train tracks—her brothers Israel and Zelig, eight and a half and ten years old.

After the war, Jacob took the album to Bilke. Each day, she met the train, hoping that someone from her family would be on it, but no one ever was. A few people recognized themselves or someone they knew in the album, and she allowed them to keep the photographs—perhaps ten in all. She and a friend named Max Zelmonavic, a butcher, paid a bribe to cross into Czechoslovakia, and were married. In exchange for money to go to America, she let the Jewish Council in Prague make a copy of the album. Jacob and Zelmonavic arrived in Florida in 1948 and lived in Miami, where Jacob worked as a waitress. In 1958, she was a contestant on the television show "Queen for a Day," in which four women told why they thought they should win, and what they wanted if they did. Women usually asked for such things as a washer and dryer, because they had eight children, or a vacation, because they had never had one. Jacob asked for five hundred dollars to have a plastic surgeon remove the number A-10862 from her arm. It had been tattooed there at Auschwitz. She said that she didn't want a general anesthetic. Having been awake when it was drawn, she wanted to be awake to see it removed. She won.

In 1980, Jacob gave the album to Yad Vashem, which invited her to Israel. On the way home, she stopped at Auschwitz. She told a reporter, "I want to see for myself that my parents are not there, that my parents are really dead. That's the only way I can rid myself of that memory."

The Jacob album begins with the train's arrival at Auschwitz and shows the doors being opened; the people stepping out, the children and mothers, the young men, the old people too weak to stand; the suitcases and bags left behind; the lines made for the selections; the people chosen for death walking toward the gas chambers; the men and

women selected for work with their heads shaved. No one knows why the photographs were taken. Possibly they were made to show Richard Baer, the new commandant, how the camp operated; or to be sent to Berlin to show officials how efficiently the camp was run. Without them, there would have been no photographic record of the selection process at Auschwitz.

Over the years, survivors have recognized people in the photographs, and the album includes a key on each page which identifies them. On page 146, an S.S. officer on the ramp, looking to his left, is turned far enough toward the camera that his face is plainly visible. The key identifies him as Stefan Baretzki, "who frequently used violence on the platform and was known in the camp for his cruelty and sadism." Baretzki was tried with Karl Hoecker, at Frankfurt, and the photograph was used to convict him. He was given a sentence of life plus eight years.

Another officer on the ramp, who appears mostly from the back, and never facing the lens, is identified in three photographs as Emmerich Hoecker. He carries a cane. (According to the scholar Michael Berenbaum, the cane could be used as a weapon, but mainly it allowed the officers to direct prisoners without having to touch them.) There was a Georg Hoecker at Auschwitz and a Wilhelm Emmerich, but no Emmerich Hoecker.

Neither bears any resemblance to the man on the ramp, but Karl Hoecker does.

After the war, Hoecker went back to Engerhausen and his bank job. In 1952, he turned himself in for having belonged to the S.S., which was then regarded as a criminal organization. He was sentenced to nine months, but, because of a freedom-from-punishment law passed in 1954, he was not made to serve it. He returned to the bank, and took up gardening. In 1963, he was charged with complicity in at least three cases of mass murder, each involving at least a thousand victims, and went on trial at Frankfurt.

The prosecutor described Hoecker as "a specialist in annihilation," and said that he had been brought to Auschwitz because Baer, a bureaucrat, had had no experience running a camp, as Hoecker had. "On the basis of the career of the accused," the prosecutor said, "there can be little doubt that when the annihilation machinery of Auschwitz was running at its height, at that very moment one found the right man, who together with Baer and Hoess could smoothly organize the perfect killing machinery." A woman testified that she remembered Hoecker clearly as the man on the ramp who had separated her from her mother, but her testimony was given little weight. Several people, survivors and officers, said that Hoecker

must have been on the ramp, that it was absurd to suggest that the adjutant of the camp wouldn't have been there, but no one could say for sure that he had seen him.

Hoecker testified that he was aware that trains carrying Jews arrived at the camp, and the Jews were "partially gassed," but he said that he knew nothing more about it, because the gassing was conducted at Auschwitz II, which had its own commandant. He said that he did not receive telegrams announcing the arrivals of the trains, as the adjutant before him had; during his time, Hoecker claimed, the telegrams were sent to another office. Above all, Hoecker insisted that he had never been on the ramp.

Baer, who might have given enlightening testimony, was to be tried also—he had been found in 1960, working as a woodcutter on a German estate—but he died of a heart attack before the trials began. Others who might have described Hoecker's tasks and whereabouts at Auschwitz, such as Rudolf Hoess or Josef Kramer, who had been convicted at the Bergen-Belsen trial, in 1945, had already been executed. Hoecker was found guilty of aiding and abetting the death of a thousand people on four occasions, but, in the absence of proof that he had visited the ramp, he escaped the most serious charges against him. He received seven years, from which two were deducted for the time he was held during the trial. He was paroled in 1970, returned again to his job at the bank, and died, at eighty-nine, in 2000.

In October, 2007, a documentary filmmaker named Erik Nelson arrived at the Holocaust Memorial Museum to make a film about the album. He asked Erbeiding if she regarded it as containing any mysteries, and she said that she would very much like to know whether Emmerich Hoecker is actually Karl Hoecker. Nelson, who is fifty-two, grew up in Princeton, New Jersey. Since childhood, when he read "Treblinka," by Jean-François Steiner, a novel that describes Nazi atrocities, he has been obsessively interested in the Holocaust.

Nelson specializes in what he calls "forensic history," in re-creating disputed historical incidents. He asked Douglas Martin, a graphic designer who works



for him, to create a protocol to compare four images: three of Hoecker from the American officer's album, and one thought to be of Hoecker from the Jacob album. According to Hoecker's S.S. records, he was 1.75 metres (five feet nine inches) tall. To be sure of this, Martin measured him in a photograph in which he wears his summer uniform, against a rifle in a picture at the shooting range, a Mauser, which was known to be 1.11 metres (three feet eight inches) long. Martin chose the summer-uniform image because Hoecker is facing the camera, and none of his features are distorted by being turned away from the lens, an effect that is called "keystoning." In each of the four photographs, Martin drew a line from shoulder to shoulder, then measured each line against Hoecker's shoulders in the summer-uniform photograph and found that they agreed. Then he measured from the femur socket to the ground—the inseam—and from the crook of the elbow to the palm, and those measurements also agreed. He also drew lines across the photographs at the level of the tops of Hoecker's boots, his knees, his hips, waist, neck, and the top of his head, and across all four images the lines were stable.

To determine whether the officer on the ramp identified as Emmerich Hoecker in the Jacob album was also 1.75 metres tall, Nelson sent a crew to Auschwitz to measure all the elements in the photograph that were still in place, the most prominent being the train tracks. Martin entered these measurements into a graphic program called Maya, which allows designers and architects to manipulate objects and patterns in three-dimensional space. A movie animator who has to insert a character among real actors will use Maya to scale the character, so that no matter which direction it turns it will retain a stable and plausible form. Using the measurements of the width of the tracks, Martin calculated the height of the S.S. officer on the ramp, and he was 1.75 metres tall. To be sure that he had assessed the figure from exactly the angle the photographer had, Martin created a line from one side of the track to the other. If his findings were accurate, the line would run up and down the track precisely, as if on the rails itself, and it did.

Without an image of the man's face, no evidence is incontrovertible, but Martin's calculations were scrupulous. Nelson asked a forensics specialist from the L.A.P.D. named Jim Hoerricks to review Martin's work. Hoerricks said he was certain that if Hoecker were tried today his attorney would move to suppress this evidence. Nelson also showed Erbelding and several other members of the museum staff Martin's presentation. "I feel a little more confident than I was when I first thought of Hoecker's being the officer on the ramp," Erbelding told me, "but I don't think I'll ever be convinced without a forward-facing photograph."

Over the Auschwitz album, like a gloss, clings a sense of a prideful observance of manners and customs, a tranquil and purified world, a shared purpose, a satisfaction in uniforms, boots, and accordions. Lives so exalted required trips to the hills, shotguns and game hunting, companionable dogs, wine, and the presence of young women. "That S.S. officers went on vacation didn't take us by surprise," Judith Cohen says. "What surprised us was that Auschwitz wasn't only a place to imprison men and women and kill European Jews; it was also a place to have fun."

The album's effect is discordant. The people it depicts are engaged in the greatest mass murder ever committed, yet its principal impression is of pleasure; nor do the people portrayed look like villains. "They haven't got red eyes and horns," Erbelding says. "They don't look like people you would dislike." What they have done is not written on their faces, but, even so, their faces are not especially sympathetic. They are the faces of hard men, who give the impression of being restricted in their capacities, their ranges of feeling. Hoecker's is the stray face among them which seems now and then to reflect charm, courtesy, and fellow-feeling. In many of the photographs, he assumes what seems to be a characteristic posture—passive, recessive, placid, as if requiring an invitation to join the officers who outrank him. At a hearing related to the Auschwitz trials, a doctor who worked at the camp recalled Hoecker's presence but not his name. "Adjutant was a quiet

and solitary man, modest," he said. "I never saw him among his comrades except at meals, but there also he sat by himself."

Several people at the museum told me that the strangest thing about the album for them is that a person can look again and again at the images and never find an answer to the question "How could you have done what you did?" One thing that is particularly troubling is the presence of so many doctors and the pseudoscientific legitimacy that their participation lent to the selection process. I showed the album to Robert Jay Lifton, the psychiatrist and author of "The Nazi Doctors" (1986). Alcohol, Lifton told me, is what made it possible for many of the doctors to persevere when killing was substituted for the imperative to heal, or at least to do no harm. "What the doctors found there was overwhelming," Lifton said, "even to Nazis who had seen things before. It was staggering. The doctors would have symptoms like post-traumatic symptoms; they would have bad dreams, they would be upset, sometimes they would say, 'We shouldn't be part of this,' but they would often say this while drinking. They would be taken into the hands of experienced doctors there, almost as a therapeutic response, who would say, 'Look, we didn't create this. We have to do what we do, and perhaps save some lives.' The experienced doctor would go with the new one to his first or second selection, and help him, as a matter of therapy—a socialization to evil. One has to be in some way in synch with one's environment to work. And if the environment is evil the principle holds, even though the adaptation may be more difficult."

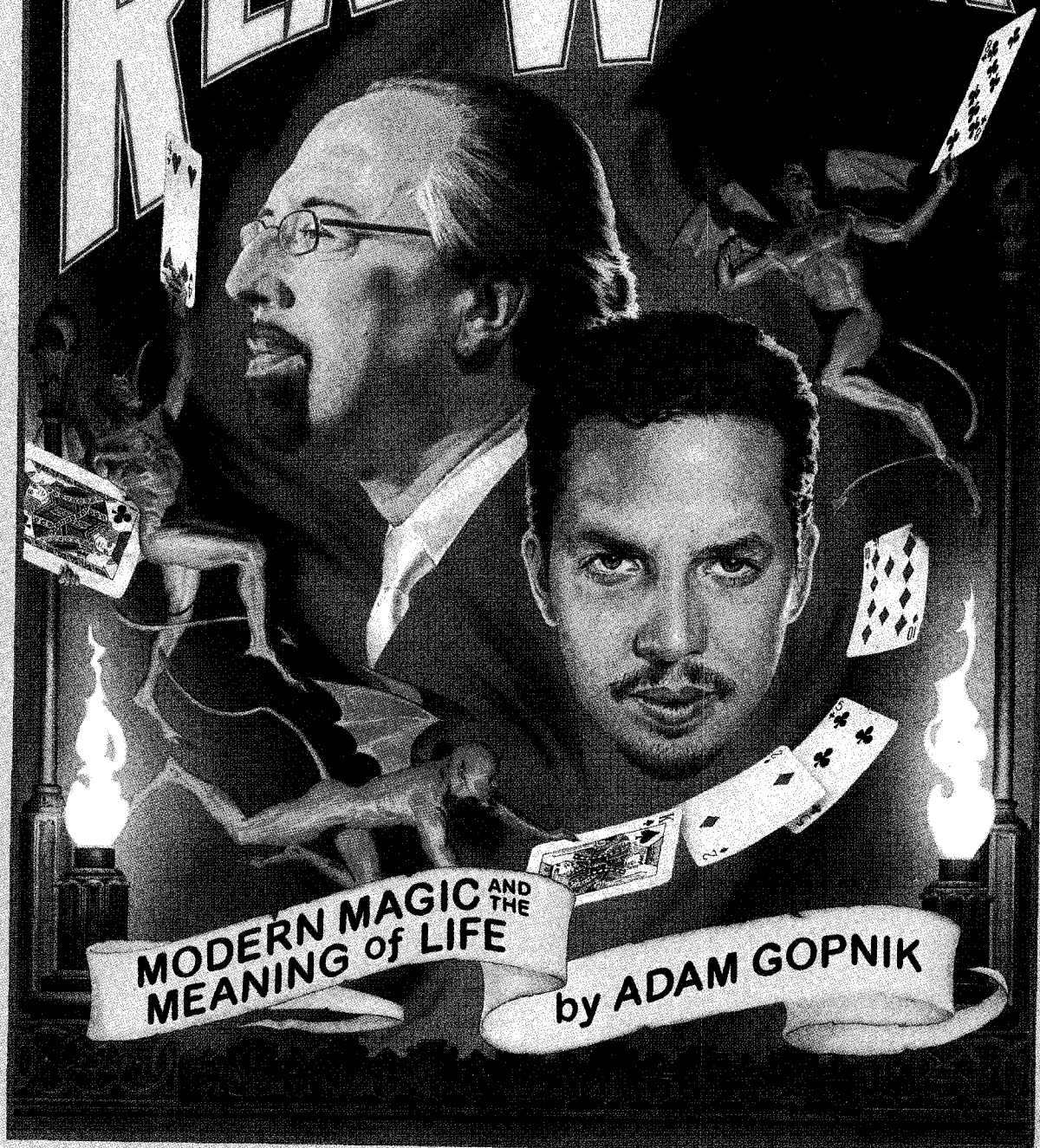
The museum has recently discussed whether to publish the album. Erbelding and Cohen feel there is more that it will disclose. For them it is a runic text. "It will constantly evolve, if we let it," Cohen says. "The research that will define it is going to be done by a scholar writing about someone whose name means nothing to us now, and then suddenly something will come through and illuminate the album." ♦

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More photographs from the Hoecker album.

OUR FAR-FLUNG CORRESPONDENTS

THE REALWORK



MARK STUTZMAN

On a long plane ride home to New York from Las Vegas, a man and a boy are playing with cards. Only their hands are visible to the people sitting near them, so that, as they shuffle and reshuffle and fan and deal, they seem to be engaged in a game of gin rummy that never quite begins. The hands move, first large and crabby, then small and soft, in example and imitation, and all through the night, hour after hour—while everyone else on the plane sleeps or dozes or watches DVDs on a laptop—their hands move and their voices murmur.

What they are doing is magic, and, because it is magic, it requires hour upon hour of hard work. A magician is teaching an apprentice how to do a card trick—a trick so complicated and subtle that it will, when finally shown, be almost too subtle to enjoy. It is called *Twisting the Aces*: the four aces are shown face down; they are counted out, still face down, one by one; the packet of cards is twisted, and each time the aces are counted out one of them, a different ace each time, appears face up. It's as though inside the packet the cards, untouched by human hands, were somehow turning over.

The magician and his apprentice are believers in the deep and narrow art of closeup card magic. A few nights earlier, they had gone, with a dozen or so other people, on a rare late-night tour of the illusionist David Copperfield's warehouse, which contains the world's greatest collection of magic paraphernalia. All of Houdini's most important boxes—the Water Torture cell, the Metamorphosis Trunk—were there, but the magician had walked over to a wall where a tiny book was kept under a false cover. "It's Malini's Erdnase!" he said, as one might say, "It's Lincoln's Bible!" The magician's face came alive as he looked through it. The boy watched, rising up on his toes to gaze at the small old-fashioned engravings of hands, neatly turned with late-nineteenth-century cuffs, manipulating cards, hands and cards, hands and cards, page after page.

The boy is one of the tribe that you will find every Saturday afternoon at Tannen's Magic, a windowless shop on the sixth floor of a nondescript building on West Thirty-fourth Street. All afternoon, the magic boys step into a tiny elevator that takes them to Tannen's. They

are often searching for relief from a needle of worry in their minds. They go to buy tricks, "gauffs," that will lend them magic. An acute boy might sense that Tannen's once was greater, or at least bigger. On a back table, he can find, half discarded in a big tub, faded old blueprints for illusion boxes—instructions for making magic cabinets of a kind that no one makes anymore. "Girl in a Dream: Illusion Plan No. 1223," one boy reads out to a friend, as they decide to buy a plan as a memento of the old magic. (Actually, it's "Girl in a Drum," but they find out only when they get it home.)

The magic boys often go for a Saturday meal to a Mexican restaurant around the corner, where they show each other their tricks. Some of them have heard of a better magicians' dinner in the back room of a little restaurant and sports bar off Ninth Avenue called the Joshua Tree. The gathering takes place in the small hours, after the last curtain of "Monday Night Magic," a lovely chamber session of magicians that has somehow survived for ten years in various theatres around the city. One of the luckiest things that have happened to me in New York is being able to go to the Joshua Tree and watch the magicians work and listen to them talk.

"Do you recall the Miser's Dilemma?"

"Wasn't that the version Al Flosso did?"

"Well, Flosso did a version of it, but it was Vernon who had the real work on it, and he announced it in Harry's book. He used to do it at the summer table at the Castle, but meanwhile Craven was doing a similar version except with the aces reversed, and with a different handling, at the Witchdoctor's table in New York. You know, the one that met around the corner from the Palace when Blackstone Junior was headlining?"

"Was that the table that Max was a regular at?"

"No, you're thinking of the Witchcraft roundabout that Vernon ran . . ."

And on and on like that, in dream-like composite. Magicians have the most rapturous and absorbed shoptalk of any artists I know. This is partly because magicians have leisure between gigs, and partly because much of the pleasure of being a magician is membership in a subculture, where methods and myths can be appreciated only by initi-

ates. Magicians are, in their relations with one another, both extremely generous and extremely jealous. Just as chefs know that recipes are of little value in themselves, magicians know that learning the method is only the beginning of doing the trick. What they call "the real work" isn't the method, which anyone can learn from a book (and, anyway, all decent magicians know roughly how most tricks are done), but the whole of the handling and timing and theatrics of the effect, which are passed along from magician to magician and from generation to generation. The real work is the complete activity, the accumulated practice, the total summing up of tradition and ideas. The real work is what makes a magic effect magical.

If I had to choose one moment where I have sensed myself in the aura of the real work, it might be the night I watched Jamy Ian Swiss, over dinner at the Joshua Tree, perform thirteen versions of the pass in about as many seconds. The pass (it is sometimes called "the shift," and card cheaters call one version "the hop") is among the glories of advanced sleight of hand. Diagrammed by S. W. Erdnase, in "The Expert at the Card Table," a treatise he published in 1902, it involves moving a packet of cards invisibly from the center of the deck to the top. Judging the quality of any magician's pass is inherently difficult, since the better it is done the harder it is to see that anything has happened. To watch Jamy Ian Swiss perform thirteen versions of the pass is to see this: The cards in his hand, then one card—say, the three of clubs—inserted somewhere, anywhere, in the middle of the deck. His hands burp and hiccup for half a second, merely squaring the deck, and then the three of clubs is disclosed, right back on top. He runs through a number of variants: the riffle pass, the stroboscopic pass, the dribble pass . . . The other magicians nod, knowingly, like bird-watchers seeing an unusual find in the middle distance.

Swiss is widely thought to have one of the masterly sleight-of-hand techniques in the world today, and the pass is one of his accomplishments. Seeing him do thirteen versions of it is therefore a little like seeing Yo-Yo Ma practice scales in rehearsal at Carnegie Hall. On the other hand, it is not at all

like watching Yo-Yo Ma practice scales, since the audience is likely to include someone like Chuy, the Mexican Wolfman, an amiable sideshow artist with a very, very full beard, or The Great Throwdini, the knife thrower, and his target girl Tina, not to mention Simon Lovell, an underfed, pale-green-and-white-complexioned Englishman who is a master card cheat—I have seen him make whole decks disappear and replace them with other decks in less time than it takes to describe it—and Todd Robbins, who is now perhaps the last remaining sideshow artist capable of doing the Human Blockhead act (a six-inch steel nail goes into and up the nose) while giving a scholarly account of its origins.

The few civilians who do come around as often as not have no idea of the quality of what they're seeing—the magician's eternal plight being that of a Yo-Yo Ma who, after he plays, has people come up onstage and tell him that they know how he does it, he scrapes that bow thing across the strings, and, anyway, they have an uncle who used to play the cello a little, has he ever met him? Most cellists, in those circumstances, would do what most magicians do—nod politely and say yes, I bet your uncle was a real music lover, and retreat into beer and diffidence. Perhaps one cellist in a generation would say no, scraping a bow against a string has nothing to do with making music, you don't know how it's done, you actually have no *idea* how it's done, and your uncle was no more a cellist than a man with a stereo is a conductor.

Jamy Ian Swiss is that cellist. He is as absolute in his passions and prohibitions as a Zen master, albeit one with a Vandyke, a small potbelly, an earring in his left ear, and a taste for Hawaiian shirts. Most nights, he maintains a note of conspiratorial mirth, leaning in toward a listener to share outrage over some stupidity—"Can you believe that guy?"—and breaking into a wolfish grin. But at times he lowers into a kind of set-faced gloom at the things the world is willing to watch and praise. Tender in his connections, a gentle and inspiring teacher of young magicians (he has performed a marriage ceremony for at least one, the young closeup man Matthew Holtzclaw), he can be brutal in his beliefs. In an old-fashioned, barking Brooklyn accent, part Bogart hiss and part Art Carney howl, he produces at

the table a flow of interrogations, exclamations, verdicts, and interdictions. "Magic only 'happens' in a spectator's mind," he puts it emphatically. "Everything else is a distraction. Magic talk on the Internet is a distraction. Magic contests are a distraction. Magic organizations are a distraction. The latest advertisement, the latest trick—distractions. Methods for their own sake are a distraction. You cannot cross over into the world of magic until you put everything else aside and behind you—including your own desires and needs—and focus on bringing an experience to the audience. This is magic. Nothing else."

A producer and collector of practical aphorisms—"In every other art, technique must be transparent; only in magic must it be invisible"; "Don't run when they're not chasing you"; "Don't make unimportant things important"; "Magicians have taken something intrinsically profound and made it look trivial"; "Closeup magic is an art looking for an easel"—he is perhaps the most feared (and resented) intellectual in the world of magic, with the saving ironic awareness that almost no one knows that there are in his world any intellects to be feared or resented. ("Mimes were invented to give magicians someone to look down on," he said one night.) He is a true intellectual in that he cannot help arguing about ideas even when it would be in his own interest, narrowly conceived, to stop. When someone says something stupid about magic, or sells something fake, or performs derivatively or cynically in some way, he just can't abide it—just cannot accept it—and uses whatever forum he has to denounce the offense. In regular columns in the magic magazines *Genii* and *Antinomy*, he launches impassioned assaults on phony magic, on "street magic," on Internet magic, and on any other kind of magical practice that seems to him to have brought shame on his profession.

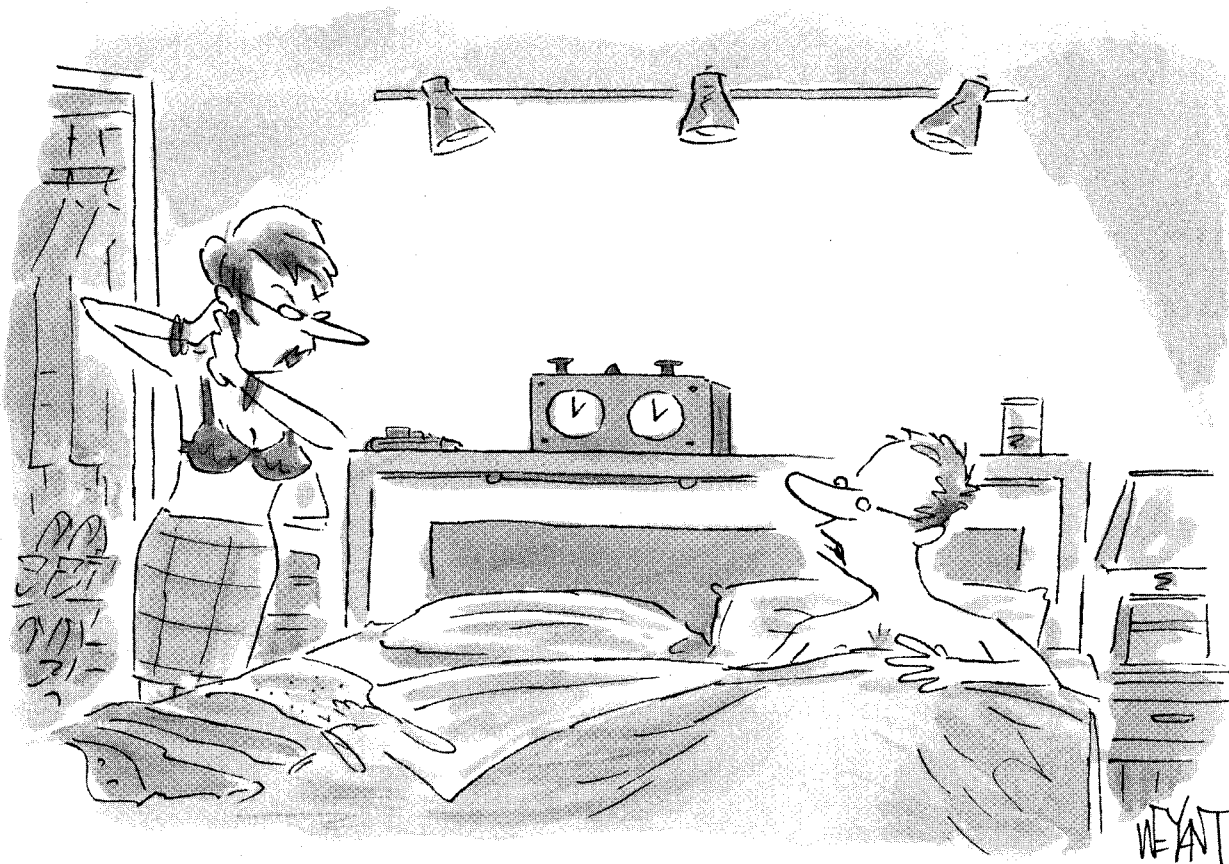
The world at large, of course, is not particularly interested in hearing why someone is wrong about magic, or doing magic the wrong way—it's all most people can do to turn up once a year at a magic show for their kid's birthday—and the magicians Jamy thinks are wrong certainly don't want to hear it, and so, like all intellectuals, he probably exasperates as many people as he enlightens. There

are those—especially on Web sites and among YouTube magicians—who believe that Jamy is a man out of time, defending a dying tradition in the face of a renaissance of new and edgier sorts of conjuring. Jamy writes to attack them, and they respond in kind. (Even his enemies call him Jamy. It's a small world.) People who don't like him find his relentless search for the meaning of magic tiresome or just pretentious. Those who follow and admire him find something gallant, and Cyrano-like, in his quest to make magic matter, not as a redoubt of nostalgia but as a living art that might cross over with the other arts. Yet even his triumphs are shaded by the rueful knowledge that often all he has to prove his convictions is card tricks, and the handful of people who care.

On the plane, Swiss's voice rises a touch: "You've got to—no, you've got to relax your wrist just then, you have to—you want it to look more casual. You're making too much of the moment. The ace is no big deal. Don't force it. Let it happen." The boy's hands go flat, and turn and start again.

Magicians like to say that magic is as old as civilization, stretching back to Egyptian priests and Greek oracles. But stage magic, performed magic, in which conjuring is acknowledged as craft and entertainment—in which, in one of Swiss's favorite aphorisms, the honest magician promises to deceive you, and then does—is probably a few hundred years old. In his essay "A Millennium of Magic Literature," Swiss accepts the significance of the date 1584, when Reginald Scot's book "Discoverie of Witchcraft" and Jean Prevost's "Clever and Pleasant Inventions" were published. Scot and Prevost, he explains, write similar things, slightly at cross-purposes: Scot is "discovering," that is, debunking, witchcraft—there are no witches, he says, and he explains how the make-believe witches achieve apparently magical effects. Prevost's book presents itself as a book of tricks, to be done for pleasure. From the start, then, the history of magic-as-fun is interwoven with the history of magic-as-fraud, more or less the way the history of chemistry is bound up with the history of alchemy.

Modern magic may begin around



"Do you think we can forgo the chess clock tonight?"

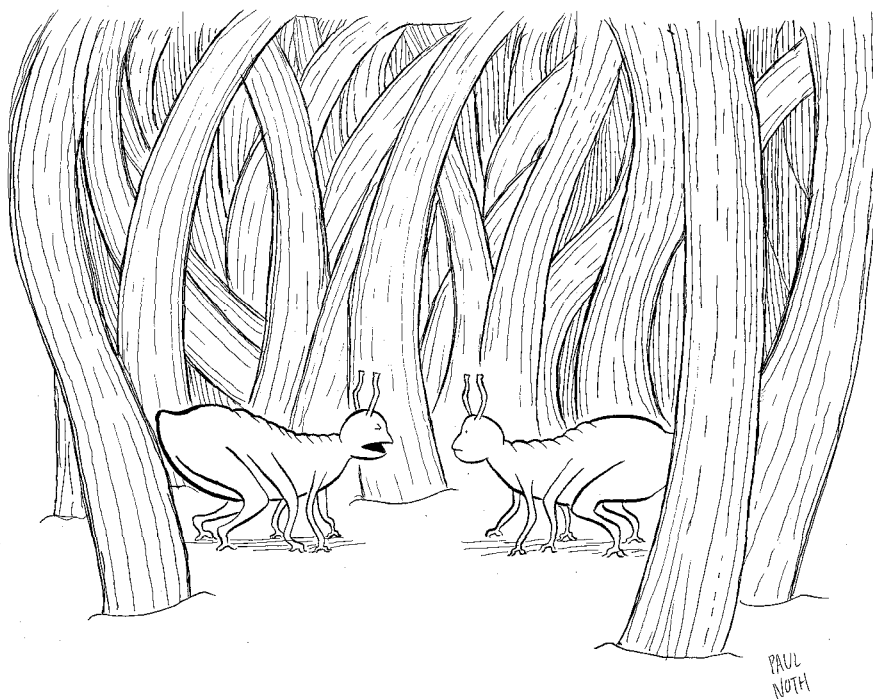
1905, in Ottawa, when the very young David Verner read S. W. Erdnase's "The Expert at the Card Table." Appropriately, it's a deeply mysterious text. Who Erdnase was and why he wrote, and self-published, his book are two abiding enigmas of modern magic. No one of that name has ever been found, and the general agreement is that it is a pseudonym, probably for someone named Andrews. (Turn it around.) He seems to have been a cardsharp rather than a magician; most of the book is taken up with cheating techniques, daintily not always called such. (As for why he gave away his craft, William Kalush, the founder of the leading magic library in New York, suggests that Erdnase may have been suffering from the perpetual fantasy among nonwriters that writing books is a way to make money.) In Erdnase, you see the same relation between display and deceit that has always been part of magic, only instead of doing things that could get you burned alive at an auto-da-fé he is doing things that could get you shot dead at a

card table. But his inventory of closeup skills—the cull, the break, the shift, the color change—became the foundation of twentieth-century closeup magic.

David Verner, or Dai Vernon, as he became onstage, is the protagonist of modern magic, the Jesus to Erdnase's John the Baptist. Improbable though it seems for a closeup card magician who spent much of his life in residence at a private magic club, he has been the subject of two full-scale biographies, one of them a multivolume scholarly work, not to mention a huge commemorative and annotative literature within the magic world. Trying to explain his stature to civilians, magicians call him "the Picasso of magic," but Vernon is really something closer to its Marcel Duchamp. Like Duchamp, he responded to the drying up of the natural niche for his art form in his lifetime not by trying to compete with the new media—with the revolution that the photographic image and movies had wrought—but by seceding from the outside world, making magic into a secretive coterie art rather than an expansive public one.

Vernon worked at a time when movie palaces were pushing out magic venues and theatres. The great illusionist shows were slowly going out of business, while closeup magic went on mostly in night clubs. By the nineteen-thirties, as Vernon's biographer David Ben writes, "amateur magicians, with stars in their eyes, had little idea of how unsatisfying the work could be. Performers traveled great distances and performed numerous shows before unappreciative audiences. . . . Those who presented large-scale illusions, 'Tall Grass Showmen,' were shunted to the hinterlands and focused their efforts on the cities, towns and villages that received little entertainment—of any sort."

Throughout the twenties and thirties, Vernon alternated magic shows, some successful, with long periods as an itinerant silhouette cutter. Yet during this discouraging time for magic he began the work that led to his greatest routines, among them *Twisting the Aces* and *Triumph*, in which a deck mixed up face up and face down suddenly straightens itself out, producing, as



"What I'm about to tell you does not leave this mustache."

a bonus, a selected card. Triumph is to magic what "I Got Rhythm" is to jazz, the basis of innumerable variations.

Two stories shape Vernon's myth. The first is about how, in Chicago in 1922, he fooled Houdini, who boasted of being able to figure out any card trick, with a version of the routine called the Ambitious Card. Vernon was put off by Houdini's bad grace in the face of his own perplexity, and this helped create a divide that can still be found among magicians: between those who see Houdini, perhaps the most famous name in entertainment history, as essentially a tourist trap—a Salvador Dali, there for the flash and the obvious effects, but not even a competent closeup man or illusionist—and those who see Houdini's fame as proof positive that he did the first thing a magician needs to do, which is to grasp the mind of his time.

The second story is about how, in the nineteen-thirties, Vernon embarked on what became the legendary quest of modern magic, the search for the center dealer. (Karl Johnson tells the story beautifully in his book "The Magician and the Cardsharp.") Vernon had heard rumors of a cardsharp who was able to deal not merely the bottom card or the second card of the deck, in the usual way, but

from its center—meaning that a chosen card could be dealt at will, no matter where the deck was cut—and, after years of looking in the hardscrabble gamblers' underground of Depression America, he found him, just outside Kansas City. Vernon learned the move, and taught it to a handful of other magicians.

The story, as usually told, emphasizes Vernon's search for "naturalness," for methods of card manipulation that would look entirely real, even under scrutiny. The deeper meaning of the myth, though, is that the magician is one of the few true artists left on earth, for whom the mastery of technique means more than anything that might be gained by it. He center-deals but makes no money—doesn't even win prestige points—because *nobody knows he's doing it*.

Vernon grasped that there is an imbalance between the spectator's experience and the performer's, greater even than the normal imbalance in the arts between the insider and the outsider. We could watch Horowitz's fingers on the keyboard as we listened to the music; if we could admire Vernon's fingers on the deck as he did the trick, he wouldn't be doing it right. This makes insiders' experience of magic distinctive, a clinging together within a charmed circle of knowledge. Erdnase's

genuine criminality became, in Vernon's hands, a kind of symbolic criminality—an aesthetic of the clandestine.

Vernon's insistence on "natural handling," on making every move look casual rather than "presentational"—like a man handling cards rather than like a magician handling props—is a precept of modern magic. But magic, like novel writing or acting, is *always* bending toward naturalism, and, very quickly, the forms of naturalism become rigidly stylized. The nineteenth-century magician Robert-Houdin insisted on magicians' wearing gentleman's evening clothes, instead of the elaborate sorcerer's and Chinese costumes that conjurers usually wore onstage. The white tie and tails and top hat became the magician's regalia well into the twentieth century, long after everyone else had stopped wearing them. Like the Polish Hasidim, whose move toward spontaneous religion kept them in the ordinary clothes of the eighteenth century, magicians wore a costume that had first been meant as camouflage. The task of making magic seem natural must be perpetually renewed, and is more complex than just making it look offhand.

One night a year ago, a young magician came into the Joshua Tree and auditioned while Swiss sat having grilled salmon and a microbrew. He did a "torn and restored" bill trick—tearing up a dollar bill and then making it whole again. Swiss took him aside, and could be seen talking to him, sharply but intensely, explaining, teaching. Someone asked what was wrong with the trick; it had seemed very neatly done.

"He was appealing—he did have a nice persona," Swiss said, leaning into the table. "He could do the moves. But he tore the dollar up slowly, like this." Swiss replicated the young magician's careful, studied action. "Why? Why would you tear it up slowly? Nobody tears a dollar bill up in the first place, but, if you're going to tear up a dollar bill at all, you'd tear it up quickly, in a sudden fit, zip-zip-zip." He demonstrated. "The only reason you would tear a dollar bill up slowly is if you were doing something else to it at the same time—if you were doing a goddam magic trick. So right away we're off in the magic land of 'I have in my hand an ordinary deck of cards.' But, O.K., let's live with that. Why are you tearing it up? Are you doing it an-

grily? Gaily? Why are you asking me to watch you tear up a dollar bill? The method is not the trick. The method is never the trick. Once you've mastered the method, you've hardly begun the trick."

All grownup craft depends on sustaining a frozen moment from childhood: scientists, it's said, are forever four years old, wide-eyed and self-centered; writers are forever eight, over-aware and indignant. The magician is a permanent pre-adolescent. At least, all lives of magicians begin with a twelve-year-old at a place like Tannen's. "Jamy Ian Swiss is actually my name," Jamy said at another dinner. "And I grew up in Brooklyn, in Flatbush and then in Sheepshead Bay. My mother gave those names to me because 'Jamy' couldn't be shortened, and 'Ian' sounded elegant and English somehow, high class. The 'Swiss' is a Jewish name that got changed somewhere along the road." Often battling with his mother, he loved his father, who got him started in magic. "I was an awkward and shy kid, with bottle-glasses and a horrific speech impediment," he said. "Then one day my father brought home, to amuse me, a Color Vision box that he had bought at Tannen's."

The Color Vision box is one of the simplest of self-working tricks. The magician gives you a cube with a different color on each side and a box; you put the cube in the box with the color of your choice facing up, and replace the lid. The magician discerns your choice without seeming to open the box. "I thought it was wonderful, amazing, and he taught me how to do it," Swiss said. "And then we started going to Tannen's together, taking the train in on Saturdays, all the way from Sheepshead Bay to Times Square."

"In those days, Tannen's was in the Wurlitzer Building, behind Bryant Park, where the Verizon Building is now. You just can't imagine the effect Tannen's could have in those days on a shy kid with a speech impediment. It was a scene! Everyone would be there! There were photographs of magicians from floor to ceiling, and shadow boxes filled with effects, and Tannen's symbol, a hat and a rabbit, was inlaid right in the linoleum. And so full of light! The magicians were everywhere, and they were such elegant and resourceful men. They would all drop in

and do work just for the pleasure of it. Lou Tannen himself was there, a kind man who loved magic and sympathized with kids. He actually taught me a version of the cups and balls. Whenever anyone asks me how I started, I say, Just the same way you did. When I was awkward and twelve and bought a trick."

It was around then that Swiss had his first epiphany about the power of magic and its risks. "We had a mixed-up family, often at odds with each other, but there was one cousin, I'll call her Sharon, whom I adored. I would show her the Color Vision box, over and over, and she *loved* me for doing it. She couldn't get enough of it. But she kept begging me and begging me to show her how I did it, and at last I did. And she was furious—absolutely furious! The trick was so simple, even stupid. I learned a huge lesson that day, and not just not to tell civilians the secrets. It was more complicated and ambiguous than that, and it's taken me years to work out all of its meanings. It was"—he paused—"it was that the trick was not the trick, and that it was the interchange between us that was the source of the effect."

At the age of twenty-nine, after short flings in the pet trade and the telephone business, Swiss took a year off, while his wife at the time supported him, and spent it doing nothing but sleight of hand.

"Mastering magic at twenty-nine is as late to begin seriously as it would be if you were studying violin. I felt that I had hands like stumps. It's why I still so envy closeup men like Prakash, who has such soft hands. By the end of the year, I had begun to get very good, technically, and I had heard somewhere that you could work as a magic bartender. So I went to bartender school." He looked across the table. "I loved being a bartender. Loved it! There was a blue-collar side to it, I suppose. I didn't talk with an accent like this, growing up. It was a rebellion against my cosseted middle-class upbringing. Magic was for me partly an art thing, partly a blue-collar artisanal thing, so being a magic bartender was ideal." He barks his bark. "Ha! It turned out that the whole idea of magic bars was dying even as I entered it."

In 1985, Swiss went to see a magician-and-juggler act he had been hearing about for a couple of years, called Penn & Teller. They were in the middle of their legendary stand at the Westside Arts Theatre. "The night shook me up completely. I mean, beyond completely! They made fun of magicians, and still did brilliant magic. And they refused to say that they were magicians doing a magic show, although that was obviously what it was."

Two years later, Swiss went to work



Shaker Timeouts

at the Magic Castle, the famous club in Hollywood. "I was arrogant enough to call the Castle and say that I was free to lecture or perform," he says, shaking his head, "and they let me do some work there. Naturally, I was desperate to see Vernon, and we sessioned together." Sessioning is the magicians' equivalent of jamming. Dai Vernon, who died in 1992, just shy of a century, had been the magician-in-residence there since the late sixties. "I can still recall everything he did. I did some things for him, one of them a slow-motion coin-vanish routine. That Friday, I did the afternoon lunch shows in the Close-up Gallery. Two shows. When I walked out for the first show, there was Vernon sitting in the front row, a little to my right. He was mere feet from me, and my hands began to shake. I almost dropped a gaff. Afterward, I came out and saw Vernon at the bar. I approached and apologized for my shakiness. 'You scared the hell out of me.' He waved me off.

"When I entered for the second show, there he was again, much to my surprise. I was calmer this time and the show came off without a hitch." On Sunday, Swiss gave a lecture and Vernon was there again: "I asked Vernon, 'So, Professor, did you see anything you liked?' He said, 'What do you mean, did I see anything I liked? I stayed awake for the whole thing, didn't I?'"

On the plane, the hands move. "Now, this is called Twisting the Aces," the boy explains to his father, who has put down his book, curious. "It's a Vernon trick, isn't it?" the boy asks the magician. He nods. The boy keeps a picture of Vernon as the screen saver on his computer, still young and dapper, cigarette in hand, all smoke and cards.

The boy's hands move, trying to conceal something.

"Make it natural, make it easy," the magician says.

Swiss befriended Penn & Teller, and began working with them on illusions, ideas, and routines. ("Penn taught me to drive. I'm a New Yorker, you know. Who drives? Penn put me in a car and said, 'My ability to speak quickly and clearly is the only thing keeping us alive.'") But his friendship with Vernon led him in another direction as well—backward, in a

sense, to try to define what it was that made magic matter, why the tradition counted, and what it meant. He began to think about magic as an entertaining form of skepticism rather than as a debased form of mysticism.

In one way, this was *de rigueur* for magicians. Houdini had unmasked psychics. But it challenged the way Swiss understood his own work. A lot of magicians saw stage and closeup magic simply as fake "wonder," reproducing, in admittedly artificial ways, old rituals of death and restoration, giving people the hope, for half an hour, that real magic was possible. Even Edmund Wilson, an amateur magician, insisted that magic's most enduring effects came from its imitation of ancient mystery religion. Vernon, though, knew better. As he put it, "A spectator never or rarely was fooled by what a magician performed for him in the way of tricks."

As Swiss wrote the series of essays that were eventually collected in his book "Shattering Illusions," he arrived at the idea that magic was, in his words, "an experiment in empathy"—a contest of minds, in which the magician dominates by a superior grasp of the way minds work. The spectator is not a dupe who gets fooled but a rational actor who gets outreasoned. When the aces are twisted, the viewer doesn't think, That's supernatural! The viewer thinks, I know it's a trick, but my mind is unable to imagine how any trick of the fingers could alter the cards when they're obviously still right in the middle of the pack.

In a recent summing-up essay in *Antinomy*, Swiss observed that, whereas a juggler like the young Penn Jillette doesn't have to imagine an audience to experience his effects, the magician must: "From the very start, the moment a magician looks into his practice mirror, he is envisioning an alien awareness—a mind other than his own, perceiving an illusion that he is creating but cannot actually experience for himself." Only by a com-

mand of intellectual empathy can the magician lead the viewer down an explanatory highway from which there is no exit, or, better, from which there are six exits, all of them blocked. Magic is imagination working together with dexterity to persuade experience how limited its experience really is, the heart working with the fingers to remind the head how little it knows.

"The one thing I can do that Steven Spielberg can't is to say, 'Take a card, any card you like,'" Swiss says. "And I can have you sign it, so that it's unique in the world, and then I can make it disappear from the deck and find it in your pocket and hand it back to you. That one card. Your mind and mine."

At every moment in the history of magic, there is an anti-magician to go along with the mainstream magicians," Swiss says. The opposition between Vernon, the chamber genius, and Houdini, the charismatic star, goes on. The anti-magician of the moment is David Blaine, the patron saint of street and YouTube magic, the prophet of the new illusionism, but also its subverter.

Close up, Blaine is beautiful, in a fifties, Actors Studio, young-Brando way, a perfect Jewish sheikh: hooded eyes, a high forehead, and a steady gaze, which he knows how to avert in awkward vulnerability. He wishes to press the edges of the form, and he believes that the future of magic lies in a naturalism beyond even Vernon's. In his next piece, this fall, he will attempt to stay awake for a million seconds (or 11.57 days), as a comment on both endurance and, obliquely, the practice of psychological torture: he will be sleepless for our sins.

Blaine first became famous for doing tricks on television—some old and simple, some new and radical—but with the emphasis always on the faces of people, mostly girls, reacting with screams and gasps and semi-sexual eye rollings. ("Blaine saw something that we all saw, how people looked when they got 'fried,'" one old-timer says, "and then just turned the camera around.") Meanwhile, he never broke his air of moody, cool detachment.

He has a two-floor studio in Tribeca that is lined with magic posters of the great illusionists and seems usually to be accessorized with beautiful women, Na-

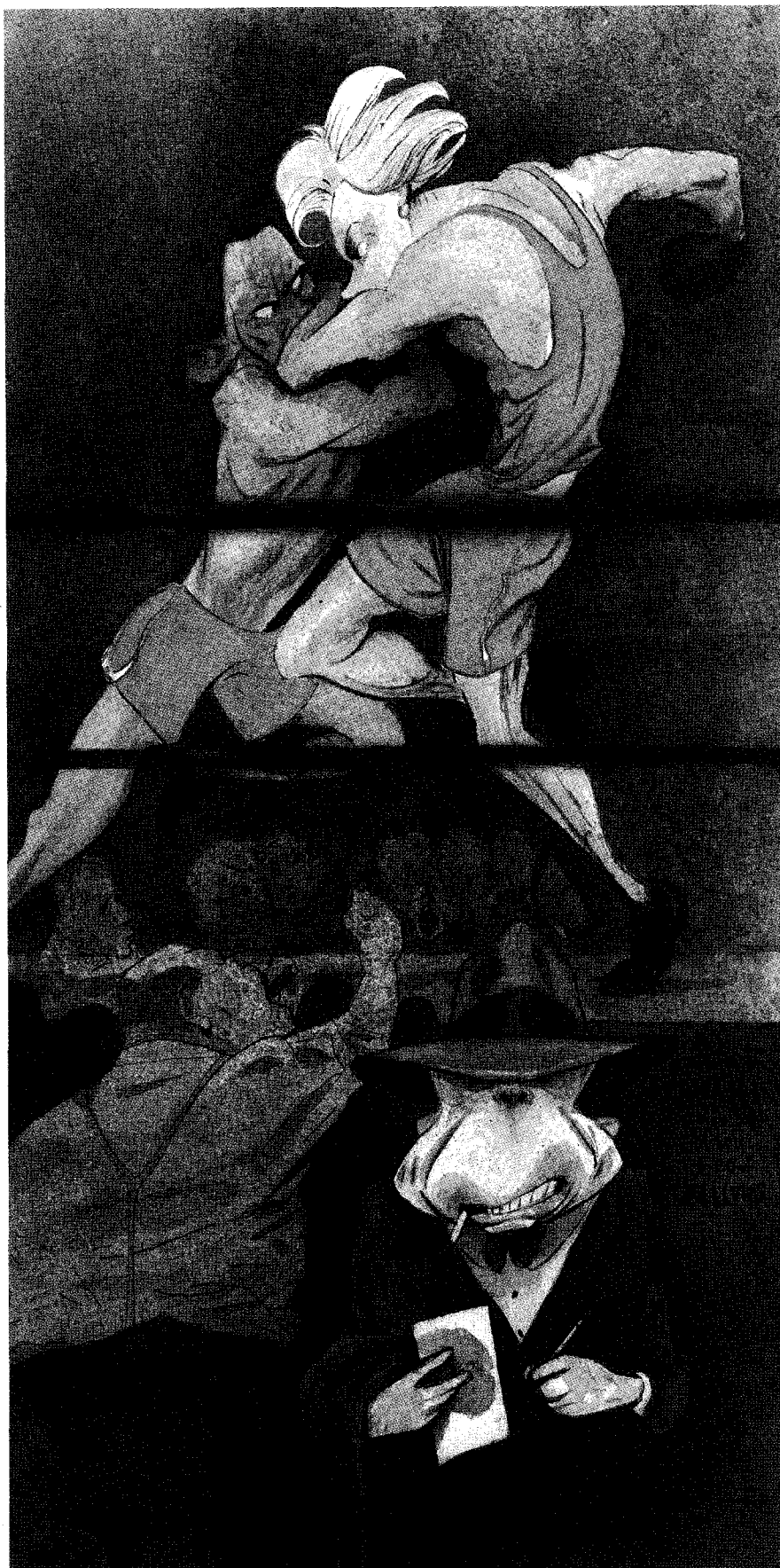


dias and Anyas. It tends also to be filled with a posse of purposeful young magicians in black, who both learn from Blaine and teach him—"He saved magic," one of them, the brilliant card man and street magician Daniel Garcia, said flatly—and is the center of a small, flourishing new enterprise, a kind of merger of magic with performance art. David Blaine has become best known for what he calls "endurance art," genuine, ungaffed daredevilry: standing on a pole for thirty-five hours, living in a water-filled plastic bubble or encased in ice. Not long ago, he claimed a record for the longest time spent underwater by a mammal, not counting a few species of whale.

"It's something I've been working my way around to," he murmured, one Friday evening in December, in his studio, talking about his sleepless project. "It started out just with lions." He shows an image he had Photoshopped of himself as Daniel in Rubens's "Daniel in the Lions' Den," a swarthy Brooklynite among the Baroque roarers. "But just being in a room with lions isn't about anything. So then I thought, What's the worst torture someone can undergo? And I realized it's going without sleep. So I researched it, you know, and found out what the record was. The guy who set the record didn't train for it, and he went kind of crazy afterward. I know I'll start to hallucinate and everything—but my idea is to do it outdoors and let people do anything they want to keep me awake. Stay awake for five days, and *then* bring out the lions." He makes his half smile. "All my work is about honesty. Magic card tricks—we have to get beyond that. If magic is just magicians doing card tricks to impress other magicians—I'm not interested in that anymore. I don't want magic that looks real. What I want are real things that feel like magic."

His stunts are not stunts; they actually take place. His way of staying awake for a million seconds is to stay awake for a million seconds. There is a famous, and dangerous, illusionist's effect called the Bullet Catch; it is, of course, an elaborate and dangerous trick. Blaine insists that if he caught a bullet he would catch a bullet. "That's what Chris Burden did," he says, referring to the pioneering performance artist of the seventies, who did once have himself shot (in the arm) for art. "David

THE NAKED CAMPAIGN BY STEVE BRODNER



Stag and Doe Night at McSharkey's (with apologies to George Bellows).

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Copperfield made the Statue of Liberty disappear, but then it came right back. My ideal magic would be *really* making the Statue of Liberty disappear, so that it never comes back, even if I have to go to jail afterward."

Las Vegas, at the MGM Grand: Swiss is about to go into David Copperfield's show, while the banked drill of slot machines whir and ping nearby. It is sometime in the middle of the night, in a casino with no clocks or windows. Las Vegas is the last place in America where magic thrives in the normal American way: people get paid a lot to do it, and a lot of people pay to see it. Not as many as once did, perhaps—"I liked Vegas better when the Mob ran it" is the constant, semi-ironic complaint of the old-timers. They mean that the Mob's Vegas derived so much of its profit from gambling that the fun (and the food) could be given away more or less free, and a lounge could sponsor a closeup magician just because the owner liked him. These days, many show rooms are "four-walled," leased out by the owner and expected to be profit centers in themselves. Nonetheless, Big Magic, at least—the modern version of the splashy disappearing-girl shows that were once magic's mainstay—continues to flourish. Performers such as Lance Burton, Penn & Teller, and David Copperfield have successful shows that have run for years.

Swiss is talking about the recent past of Big Illusion: "After 'The Ed Sullivan Show' ended, and before Doug Henning, there was nothing. There was always some guy out there somewhere sawing a woman, but that was it. Doug Henning did what Robert-Houdin set out to do—he presented magic in the dress of the time, only now it was tie-dye and long hair and hippieness. That saved illusion, at least on television. And then Copperfield came along. Copperfield—I remember when he was still calling himself Davino, at Tannen's." He shakes his head.

A stranger comes by and greets Swiss, a little warily. They exchange some magic shoptalk. Swiss laughs as the man walks off. "I got into a *bitter* argument with that guy at the Magic Castle last month. He was telling a young magician about the necessity of being pragmatic, making compromises for your art, and I said, 'What the fuck do you know about a work

TERRIBLE THINGS ARE HAPPENING . . .

Terrible things are happening
in Russian novels!

Just yesterday I heard
in the café
of two peasants, long friends,
one in sudden possession
of a watch
hanging
from a gold chain
which so disturbed his compadre
he stole
upon the other unsuspecting, prayed
to god
and slit his throat, fleeing
with the watch—
and that's not the worst of it!

Just yesterday my love and I too
had not exactly a "fight"
but a "reckoning"
perhaps, or no—a
"conversation" which opened the ocean
of grief
and now she is in another city
perhaps crying
and not because of Russian novels

—Maureen N. McLane

of art, or what it takes to make one." He smiles sheepishly. Like many combative souls, he takes his feuds and eruptions as part of the weather in his world, and assumes that his disputants do, too.

Copperfield's show turns out to be much more loose-limbed and intelligent than his reputation for big dumb-stunt illusions suggests. He does the expected things—levitates through a steel plate, and makes thirteen audience members

disappear (and reappear, at the back of the auditorium, where they giggle slightly in ways suggesting that their disappearance was less confounding than it seemed). But his oddly touching *pièce de résistance* is a confessional number about his father's failed career as an actor, and his own estrangement from his grandfather, and the old man's dream of one day winning the lottery and buying a green Lincoln Continental—probably the only case of a sad-

bad-parenting memoir that ends with the thumping appearance on a Las Vegas stage of an actual green Lincoln.

After the show, over omelettes at the Peppermill, a Las Vegas institution and show-biz hangout at the older, northern end of the Strip, Swiss meditates on the difference between the way audiences experience an illusion show now and the way they did a century ago. "It's a good show, a fun show—who can deny it? But what do people come to a Big Magic show for now? Celebrity? To be amazed? What did they come for then? Of course, there was less to see in the world then. They weren't going home to watch television. But I think they were there for beauty, too. A lot of what magicians did then was just meant to be beautiful. It got that *Abhh* sound you hear when Teller does the goldfish." He meant a signature Penn & Teller piece in which Teller turns water into silver coins and the coins into goldfish. "David Ben does an illusion show set in 1909, and, because it's set then, he does it much slower than we do now. And that kind of stage slowness turns out to be the right speed for magic. It isn't a high-speed art. The beauty lies in the unfolding, not in being zapped to the finish. It does for me, anyway. Onstage, it takes me three minutes to say my name."

The next night, David Copperfield takes Jamy Ian Swiss, and the twelve-year-old, and a mysterious family of Russians to his warehouse of magical paraphernalia. As they ride there in a limo, Copperfield explains the origins of his collection—it is a much larger version of the famous Mulholland collection—and hints at its treasures, largely, it seems, for Swiss's benefit. In photographs, Copperfield assumes a manner of chilly mastery; in person he is open, bending, almost needy, reminding the world of his triumphs—his renown, his Emmys—as though the scale of his accomplishments still surprised him, too.

"Jamy? You'll be amazed when you see what I have at the warehouse," Copperfield says. "You were at Tannen's, too, right? Of course you were! I loved it with Lou. Did you know Lou? Did you see me in the Jubilee the year I was eighteen, when they gave me the whole second half?"

The warehouse is the size of an airplane hangar, windowless and fluorescent-lit in the Vegas night. Copperfield has

been building it for years, and has no intention of making it public; he offers tours, guided by him, as he thinks they are merited. Upstairs, he shows Swiss one beautiful piece after another, in spotlight cases. Everything is here. There are boxes of off-the-shelf magic sets for boys, a century's worth, stacked high into the air. There are the great monochrome posters of Alexander, the Man Who Knows; and posters of Charles Carter, in Egypt, being hanged, fighting the Devil himself. There is the complete outfit and wiring of the performer Mr. Electric, an "Ed Sullivan" regular. And there is nearly everything of Houdini's that matters: the original milk can that Houdini escaped from; one of the Metamorphosis Trunks (a fragment of the True Cross); and, on wax cylinders, the only recordings of Houdini's voice, high and hectoring and European-sounding as he does his patter.

There is the gun with which the great Chung Ling Soo (actually an American named William Ellsworth Robinson) was killed onstage at the Wood Green Empire, in London, in 1918, when his Bullet Catch number hit a snag. ("Oh my God. Something's happened. Lower the curtain" were his last words onstage, and the first ones he had spoken there in English for almost twenty years.) The apparatus for a Carter number, where a girl was pulled up in a chair, and then disappeared, shows the way the little chair gets hoisted into the framework of the machinery, leaving the damsel suspended. There is the sawing table where Orson Welles sawed Marlene Dietrich in half. Then, there are the automatons that Robert-Houdin built in the mid-nineteenth century, tiny clicking cogs and wheels and whirling clockwork: a brass Chinaman actually does the cups and balls, and each time the cups come up something new is underneath them. And books, wall after wall of bookshelves, with not only Max Malini's original copy of Erdnase but also a first edition of "Discoverie of Witchcraft" and the writings of Méliès, the French magician who invented special effects (dissolves, double exposures) in early movies—the effects that doomed Big Magic.

And then there is a wall of old, signed

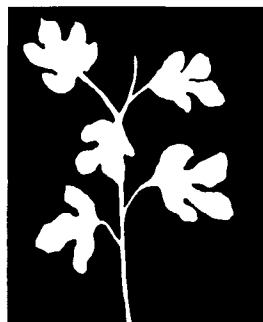
publicity photographs of magicians: magicians with top hats, magicians resting their hands sapiently on their bearded cheeks; magicians grave and sage and, sometimes, witty and waggish, in top hats and tails, rising from floor to ceiling.

"Jamy? Do you see what it is?" David Copperfield says, triumphant.

"It's the wall from Tannen's," Swiss says softly, looking up at it as he must have done as a twelve-year-old. "It's the original photographs they had up, intact," he tells the twelve-year-old with him. The magicians, shining and unchanged since the sixties, beam down on their protégés, as though Lou were still behind the counter below.

Finally, in a small, crowded space upstairs, Copperfield carefully displays a legendary apparatus: the flower vase of Karl Germain, the great Cleveland-born magician. The vase stands up, music plays, a pass is made—and a whole rosebush slowly rises from inside, higher and higher, the petals of the roses unfolding as though waking up. The music plays, the roses grow and grow, higher and higher still, petals unfolding, and Copperfield cuts them off and gives one to each woman in the room.

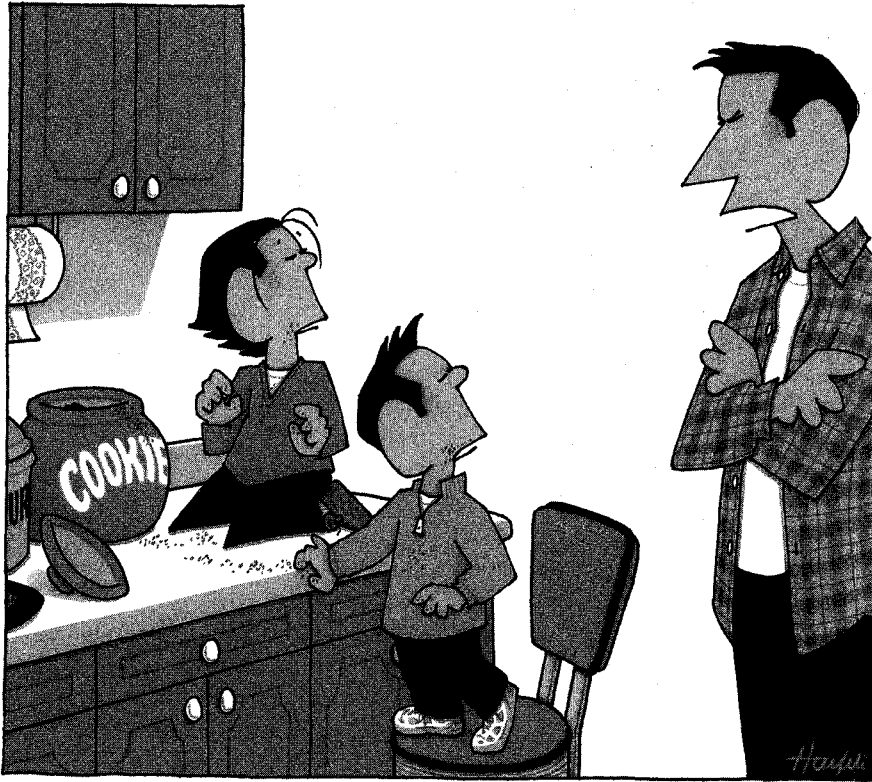
How does it work? Where do the roses come from? One difficulty in writing about magic is that it is considered a cardinal sin to reveal methods, even when you are an outsider who barely grasps them—particularly when you are



an outsider who barely grasps them. "Exposure" is a hanging crime in the magic world. In the eighties, Penn & Teller provoked hack magicians to attack them for doing the cups and balls in transparent glasses. (Of course, they did it so nimbly and surprisingly that they exposed nothing but

the absurdity of "exposure.") About all an outsider may say is that the surprising thing about most magical methods is not how ingeniously complex they are but how extremely *stupid* they are—stupid, that is, in the sense of being completely obvious once you grasp them.

The trick to Swiss's Color Vision box, to engage in an exposure that is surely harmless, since his cousin Sharon knows all about it (and has had forty years to tell



"Don't make me resort to alternative questioning techniques."

her friends, indignantly), is that the lid of the box is secretly moved by the magician to the side of the box; that is, the magician has revolved the box so that the top is now the back, and the lid is on what is now the side. He sees what the color is just by looking at it. What this teaches us is not that people are stupid but that the concept of rotating an object, though obvious, is in some way defeated by our familiarity with boxes and lids—a lid always goes on top. The move is not outside our imaginations but remote from our experience.

Most big illusions, similarly, involve a remarkably limited, though resourcefully manipulated, arsenal of mirrors and lights. We will ourselves both to overlook the obvious chicanery and to overrate the apparent obstacles. Or we imagine that an elaborate bit of trickery couldn't be achieved by stupidly obvious means. People participate in their own illusions. That is why a magician's technique must be invisible; if it became visible, we would be insulted by its obviousness. Magic is possible because magicians are smart. And what they're smart about is mainly how dumb we are, how limited in vision, how narrow in imagination, how resourceless in conjec-

ture, how routinized in our theories of the world, how deadened to possibility. The magician awakens us from the dogmatic slumbers of our daily life, our interactions with cards and hoops and things. He opens a door by pointing to a window.

Why does it matter? "Magic is the most intrinsically ironic of all the arts," Teller is saying. "I don't know what your definition of irony is, but mine is something where, when you are seeing it, you see it in two different and even contradictory ways at the same time. And with magic what you see collides with what you know. That's why magic, even when merely executed, ends up having intellectual content. It's intrinsic to the form."

Onstage, Teller's character is mute. In his own house—twenty minutes outside Las Vegas, an Expressionist concrete box, a stone fortress with trapezoidal windows cut in it, Dr. Caligari's remake of the Whitney Museum—over excellent cornmeal waffles, he is voluble, articulate, opinionated, and exact. Small and curly-haired, he looks like Harpo Marx released from his vow of silence and given tenure.

His is one of those houses perfectly

shaped to the needs of their fastidious and eccentric owners: it is hung with his father's paintings; there is a beautiful coffin, given to him by a close friend for his fifty-fifth birthday, and a handsome dining table with a skeleton embedded in its glass top, its arms and feet shackled to a rack. (To extend the table for company, you turn a crank, which stretches out the skeleton, causing moans and screams to sound through a concealed speaker.) Bookcases revolve and reveal secret passageways to the next room. The Christmas tree is still up, and decorated with skulls and metallic-red devil's heads.

"There is a more romantic way to do it, to calm down the intrinsic irony, but that can get schmaltzy," he goes on. "Many magicians do that, but it tends toward the sentimental."

In Las Vegas, Penn & Teller have not compromised their act. They do a flag burning onstage—or, rather, seem to do it—before restoring the flag completely, in a variation of the torn-and-restored dollar; it's a heartfelt libertarian tribute to American freedom. And they end with a staggering Bullet Catch, the stunt that killed Chung Ling Soo. (Someone remarks to Teller that the Bullet Catch seems to be the "Macbeth" of magic, the bad-luck piece, and he says, dryly, "Yes. You're standing onstage firing bullets at the magician with a live gun. That might be bad luck.")

Swiss tells Teller about the tour of the Copperfield warehouse and his rediscovery of the wall from Tannen's. Though Teller grew up in Philadelphia, he recognizes the key moment memorialized by the wall. "There's a moment in your life when you realize the difference between illusion and reality and that you're being lied to," he says. "Santa Claus. The Easter Bunny. After my mother told me that there was no Santa Claus, I made up an entirely fictitious girl in my classroom and told my mother stories about *her*. Then I told my mother, 'You know what—she isn't real.'" He smiles with somewhat Pugsley Addams-like glee, and goes on, more soberly, "If you're sufficiently preoccupied with the power of a lie, a falsehood, an illusion, you remain interested in magic tricks."

The subject of the Germain vase comes up, and Teller says, "You know the funny thing about that? A friend and I did the Germain flowers last year. We put the

music on, the *right* music played at the right time, slightly off speed, and we prepped the illusion properly, you know, had the buds set right so that they would open when you fanned them—the fanning is part of the piece—and we watched it emerge. This lovely music was playing, and we just *wept* at the beauty of it—tears streamed down our cheeks at the lovely apparition of it. That was magic.”

Of all the arguments that can preoccupy the mindful magician, the most important involves what is called the Too Perfect theory. Jamy Ian Swiss has written about it often. Presaged by Vernon himself, and formalized by the illusionist Rick Johnson in a 1971 article, the Too Perfect theory says, basically, that any trick that simply astounds will give itself away. If, for instance, a magician smokes a cigarette and then makes it pass through an ordinary quarter, the only reasonable explanation is that it isn’t an ordinary quarter; the spectator will immediately know that it’s a trick quarter, with a hinge. (Swiss wrote that once, after he performed the Cigarette Through Quarter—perfectly, in his opinion—a spectator responded, “Neat. Where’s that nifty coin with the hole in it?”)

What makes a trick work is not the inherent astoundingness of its effect but the magician’s ability to suggest any number of possible explanations, none of them conclusive, and none of them quite obvious. As the law professor and magician Christopher Hanna has noted, two of the best ways of making a too perfect trick work are “reducing the claim” and “raising the proof.” Reducing the claim means roughing up the illusion so that the spectator isn’t even sure she saw one—bringing the cigarette in and out of the coin so quickly that the viewer doesn’t know if the trick is in the coin or in her eyes. Raising the proof is more demanding. Derek Dingle, a famous closeup man, adjusted the Cigarette Through Quarter trick by palming and replacing one gaffed quarter with another. One quarter had a small hole in it, the other a spring hinge. By exposing the holed coin, then palming that one and replacing it with the hinged coin, he led the spectator to think not There must be two trick coins but How could even the trick coin I’ve seen do *that* trick? Or one might multiply the possible explanations, in a card-guessing trick, by going through

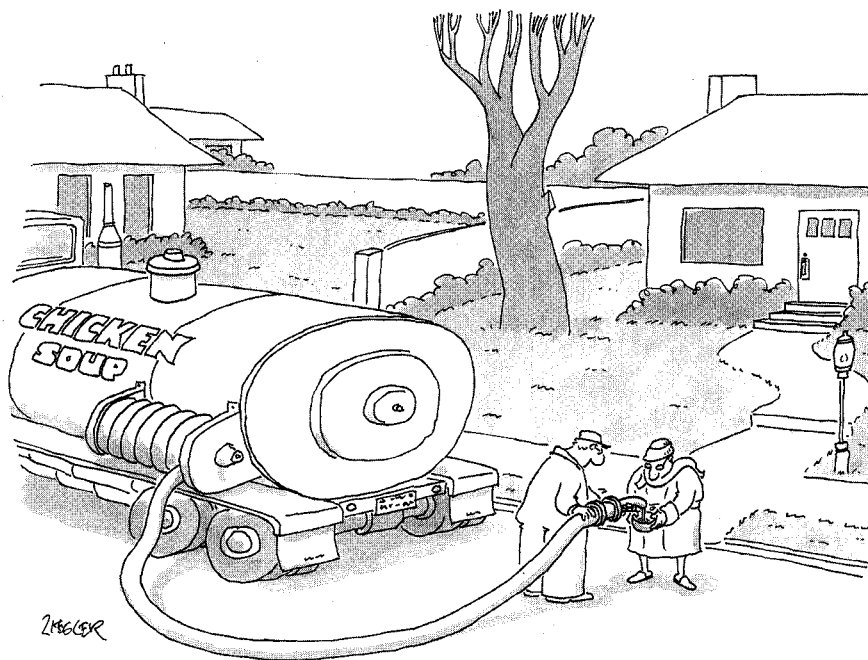
an elaborate charade of “reading” the spectator’s face and voice, so that, when the forced card is guessed, the obviousness of the trick is, well, obviated.

At the heart of the Too Perfect theory is the insight that magic works best when the illusions it creates are open-ended enough to invite the viewer into a credibly imperfect world. Magic is the dramatization of explanation more than it is the engineering of effects. In every art, the Too Perfect theory helps explain why people are more convinced by an imperfect, “distressed” illusion than by a perfectly realized one. A form of the theory is involved when special-effects people talk about “selling the shot” in a movie; that is, making sure that the speeding spacecraft or the raging Godzilla doesn’t look too neatly and cosmetically packaged, and that it is not lingered on long enough to be really seen. (All special effects appear as such when they are studied.) The theory explains the force of the off-slant scene in a film, the power of elliptical dialogue in the theatre, the constant artistic need to turn away from apparent perfection toward the laconic or unfixed. Illusion affects us only when it is incomplete.

But the Too Perfect theory has larger meanings, too. It reminds us that, whatever the context, the empathetic interchange between minds is satisfying only when it is “dynamic,” unfinished, unresolved. Friendships, flirtations, even love affairs depend, like magic tricks, on a constant exchange of incomplete but tan-

talizing information. We are always reducing the claim or raising the proof. The magician teaches us that romance lies in an unstable contest of minds that leaves us knowing it’s a trick but not which one it is, and being impressed by the other person’s ability to let the trickery go on. Frauds master our minds; magicians, like poets and lovers, engage them in a permanent maze of possibilities. The trick is to renew the possibilities, to keep them from becoming schematized, to let them be imperfect, and the question between us is always “Who’s the magician?” When we say that love is magic, we are telling a truth deeper, and more ambiguous, than we know.

Swiss is talking over dinner about the Too Perfect theory: “What magic is out to do isn’t just to amaze you but to achieve what Whit Haydn calls putting ‘a burr under the saddle of the mind.’” He leaps up from the table and becomes a man on a tightrope. “Let’s say you do a Blaine trick, one he’s done on television, where you have someone choose a card and then find it in a sealed basketball. Well, if he sees it in the basketball he knows that somehow the card’s been forced on him. It’s too perfect. But if it’s got a torn corner—or it’s signed, or if maybe instead of being inside a basketball it’s behind a backboard—he thinks, It wasn’t there before, but he can’t get over there. The mind starts working. He can’t rest here, he can’t rest here, and he stays



on the tightrope!" Swiss wavers on the imaginary wire.

"That's not the situation of the passive dupe," he says, sitting down. "It's the situation of someone whose mind is alive! It's the state of the scientist, or the artist—and magic is a fringe art, but it's not a fringe subject. Truth, deception, and mystery are big material, and they're the natural, the intrinsic subject of magic. And I propose"—he smiles briefly at the formulation, but goes ahead anyway—"that it's the only art form where that's the intrinsic subject. And that's why, with all the indignities and absurdities of being a professional magician, we'll always need magic."

David Blaine is on a strict new regime as he trains for the sleepless piece. Once a week, he runs thirteen miles in Central Park, plays basketball for an hour and a half at Chelsea Piers, and then swims several miles in a downtown pool. It is his theory that a man in perfect form will be able to survive staying awake for a million seconds. He has already lost forty

pounds, and this gives him a gaunt, spiritualized look, like the young Brando playing an AIDS patient. He is in his Greenwich Village apartment, showing a protégé a card trick and quizzing him, gently, on a book about the Holocaust that he had given him to read. The first vibe you get from him, of cool and insolence, is soon succeeded by a second, truer sense that he is a man trying to save magic not by making it more intellectual, or more raffish, but by making it potentially tragic, a high-stakes and risky endeavor that might end in grief. Seriousness is his keynote. He presses on his protégés copies of his favorite books, mostly classics of the fifties and sixties, which he keeps by the gross in a special closet: "Siddhartha," "The Catcher in the Rye," "A Confederacy of Dunces"—tales of nonconformists making their way in a monochrome world. He seems to see "mainstream" magicians the way Holden sees his teachers. His bookshelves are filled with Heidegger and Nietzsche. He has decided to call the sleepless piece "Blaine's Wake," in punning homage to Joyce, and he has recently

begun working his way through Finnegan's dream with the help of Joseph Campbell's skeleton key.

He still works intently on card tricks, of the more avant-garde kind that derive from the great Spanish magician Juan Tamariz, whom all magicians today, on all sides, uncritically revere. The card trick he is teaching his protégé involves no apparent skill, no card handling or card moving, still mind against mind, but without the interference of fingers. The effect is powerful, but the vibe is different from normal card tricks: melodramatic rather than clever, and deep rather than ironic. The odd thing is that, the longer one knows him, and the more time one spends with him, the more apparent it becomes that he is one more Tannen's boy from Brooklyn. On his desk is a photograph of the adolescent Blaine collecting an award at Tannen's summer camp, as nerdy and needy as every other boy of the tribe.

"My real work began when I was walking down the street, just practicing a one-handed shuffle, and all the guys in this garage I was walking by went *Obbbb!*" Blaine says. "*Obbbb!*—just for a shuffle! I started realizing that what I love to do is bring magic for one second—and that one second is enough. My endurance pieces are all about taking away the ego, putting yourself in a position so intense that the ordinary 'I' doesn't exist anymore. You're surviving the way a baby does—or it's like just before an accident, when you see everything, the seats and the road, and the dashboard and your life, in slow motion. That heightened sense of awareness, the blinding flash of being shocked out of your logical mind—that's magic for me."

For Jamy Ian Swiss, as for Penn & Teller, the future lies in magic being remade in the light of the real but still in the shadow of the past, losing the false front while revering the traditional techniques. For David Blaine, it lies in an increasing encroachment into the real, so that magic will become indistinguishable from performance art, at the high end, and reality television, at the low. The choice, in a sense, is between the real work and the real thing.

I have seen Blaine and Swiss together just once. It was in October, before the annual auction of magic posters and paraphernalia at Swann Galleries, on East Twenty-fifth Street, an important



"He always makes a fool of himself when he addresses the nation."

occasion in the magic subculture. Swiss was once quoted as saying that Blaine's best tricks could have been purchased for thirty dollars at a Times Square magic shop, a quote that was taken slightly out of context, and that had a gentler intention than it seems. Now, with the tough critic's optimistic belief that it was all part of the game, Swiss went up to Blaine and congratulated him. Then Swiss mentioned a young student of his who had been hanging around with Blaine as well.

"I'm trying to get him to see some of the—some of the deeper psychological things, not just tricks," Blaine said, in his Brando mumble.

"I don't think I'm showing him tricks," Swiss said.

"Not tricks, man. I mean—you know, techniques. Showing him something deeper than techniques."

"I'm not showing him tricks," Swiss repeated, quietly.

Blaine changed the subject.

Swiss went back to his seat, with his head down, his jaw set. I could see him struggling with the times—with the anger of feeling a protégé being fought over but also with the sense, which every writer knows, of helplessness in the face of the new thing, of suddenly knowing what the real fringe is like, and how it feels when you get there. We are all magicians now. The same feeling that novelists had when first confronted with movies is shared by closeup card magicians confronting television endurance artists—the feeling that something big and vital is passing from the world, and yet that to defend it is to be immediately classified as retrograde.

I saw, too, that David Blaine is absolutely sincere in his belief that the way forward for a young magician lies not in mastering the tricks but in mastering the mind of the modern age, with its relentless appetite for speed and for the sensational-dressed-as-the-real. And I thought I sensed in Swiss the urge to say what all of us would like to say—that traditions are not just encumbrances, that a novel is not news, that an essay is a different thing from an Internet rant, that techniques are the probity and ethic of magic, the real work. The crafts that we have mastered are, in part, the tricks that we have learned, and though we know how much knowledge



"There will be a bit of a wait while we figure out a market solution to your problem."

the tricks enfold, still, tricks is what they are. I felt for Jamy, and for us, and for the boy caught between.

The hands stop moving as the plane lands, and the boy and the magician leave. The aces twist one turn and the boy returns to his father for the car ride home. He clutches his Las Vegas souvenir. The magicians have the boys for a moment, between their escape from their fathers and their pursuit of girls. After that, they become sexual, outwardly so, and learn that women (or other men) cannot be impressed by tricks of any kind: if they are watching at all, they are as interested as they are ever going to be, and tricks are of no help. You cannot woo anyone with magic; the magic that you have consciously mastered is the least interesting magic you have.

Yet, for the time being, what the ma-

gicians teach the boys is that some knowledge cannot be communicated; it is yours and can only be shown, and the range of things that fathers don't know is larger than what they do. The most the father can hope to become is a stooge, a willing assistant, and a spectator with a bit of corruption. The boy has secret knowledge, which he will keep, even after life arrives and magic stops. Teach me a trick, the father says to the son, and the boy, his hands working his cards, on his way, says, "I can't teach you a trick, Dad. I'll show you an effect." And then he does, doing passes, like his teacher, all the way home. The card always comes back to the top of the deck, and, the better it is done, the harder it is to see that anything has happened at all. ♦

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Adam Gopnik talks about the art of magic.

FICTION

THE BELL RINGER

BY JOHN BURNSIDE



Half a mile beyond the sign for Lathockar mill, Eva Lowe turned off the main coastal road and took the back way through Kinaldy woods. It wasn't the most direct route into the village, but her father had always liked that stretch of road, maybe because it reminded him of Slovakia, and they'd often come this way on their Sunday walks, when her mother was still alive. It was dark, out on the narrow lane that ran past the sawmills, dark and very green, the boundary wall a dim colony of moss and ferns, the shadows under the trees damp and still. To most people, it seemed gloomy, but for Eva it was as close to the landscape of home as she could imagine—especially now, with new snow settling on the pines and on the ridges of the drystone wall, so that the land resembled nothing so much as a children's-book illustration, the snow steady and insistent in a kingdom that had succumbed to the bad fairy's spell and slept for a hundred years in a viridian web of gossamer and thorns. Her father had always loved that story, and she still had the book he had read to her from, the one he'd bought because it reminded him of home. Those pictures were her one real memento of him, page after page of watercolors from a world that, even before she opened the book for the first time, was gone forever, leaf green and sky blue and damson, wiped out by a tide of cattle trucks and unmarked graves.

Her father had been a long time dying, and Matt had lost patience with it all. He would never say what he was thinking, but it was clear that he resented the time she spent at the hospital, and Eva had started looking forward to the days or weeks when her husband was away, inspecting a rig in the North Sea or designing some mysterious installation in Egypt or Nigeria. During the last month of her father's life, Matt had been away more often than not, and that had been fine with Eva. It had given her a space to come to terms with things, a silence in which to remember her father's voice, singing to her in the language of his childhood or reciting those old folk stories that he loved. Later, when it was all over, she had found herself alone in the old farmhouse, with nowhere to go and nothing to do, and nobody to talk to but Matt's

sister, Martha, who had started coming to the house on Saturday mornings with cakes and baskets of apples. She never came when Matt was there, but when he was away she would invite herself over. It had become a routine: every Saturday, at around ten-thirty, Martha would arrive and they would sit by the Aga and have long conversations. Sometimes *too* long. It was Martha's fault, in fact, that Eva was late now, though she didn't mind that so much: her sister-in-law had been a good friend in those first days, when her grief was still raw. That was how Martha talked about such things, her language straight out of self-help books and women's magazines, but it had worked, and Eva had looked forward to sitting for hours over a plate of biscuits, telling each other the stories people tell when they are trying to remember what it was they were doing before their lives were so rudely interrupted.

Looking back, though, Eva could see that the real interruption had not been her father's death. She had always known he would die, and she had tried to prepare herself for the loss. Of course, as Martha said, you can never be truly prepared for the death of a loved one, especially when it happens so slowly and painfully. Still, the fact was that in the aftermath of the funeral, when it had seemed as if the whole world had fallen silent, what had troubled Eva most was her marriage, not her father's absence. Matt had come back for a few days to assist with the arrangements, and she couldn't help noticing his relief that this phase of their existence was over, just as he seemed relieved to be going back to work once the business of the interment was over. Until then, she had thought it was her husband she was missing when she sat up at night staring out at the orchard and the fields beyond, fields that had once belonged to Matt's people and were now rented out to neighbors. Sometimes, she remembered him as he had been when they first met: his charm, his quiet sense of humor, the little games he had played to amuse her. He would bring her flowers, or fruit from the orchard, and when it became clear that they were serious about each other he had created a long-running joke about their having identical tattoos: hearts, roses, Celtic knots, tiny blue-

birds tucked away in the secret angles of their bodies, where only they could see. That romantic phase hadn't lasted past the first year of marriage, but she still remembered it. When he'd started traveling, she had replayed it dutifully in her mind, because, she told herself, surely they had loved each other back then, and if they had loved each other once they could love each other again. Yet all the while she was aware of how deliberate that remembering was, and she knew, when she was alone, that it wasn't really Matt she was missing.

The truth was that she didn't mind being on her own; it was just that she didn't like being alone in that house. If they had lived somewhere else, if Matt had sold up and bought a property in the village—a notion he'd considered for a long time before abandoning the idea—she would have been fine. She could have got by, even when he was away for months, living his separate life, not bothering to phone for days on end and, when he did, making it clear that he had other things to think about, that this was some duty he felt he had to perform. Whenever she put down the phone, she would picture him in some bright room—a conference center, perhaps, or a restaurant—discussing weighty business with colleagues, talking about engineering or politics just loud enough so the waitress would hear. Maybe he would flirt a little, and maybe he would do more. She could see him telling his little jokes, she could see how charming he would seem to the girl, who would be young and bright and eager to please. At such times, the house would close in around her, dark, damp, utterly still, and yet busy with the echoes and memories of those who had gone before, generation upon generation of Lowes, all dark-eyed and stocky and taciturn, watching her from the shadows, listening when she spoke on the phone: listening, watching, judging. Sometimes she even imagined she saw them, though it was never final, never anything as conclusive as a haunting, just phantoms from the stories Matt had told her when they were courting: Old John Lowe with his hurricane lamp coming in from the orchard; the twins, Maybeth and Cathy, sitting on the cold flagstones in the scullery amid a litter of kittens; the stricken, defiantly cheerful

Eleanor, lying in what was now the guest room, dying slowly in her mid-teens. Whenever Eva was alone in the house, they would make themselves known, not quite present but there all the same, and it always seemed to her that they were waiting for something. After a while, she'd find herself talking, not so much to herself as to them, pretending she was somebody else, trying to win them over, and she knew she had to get out.

She hadn't known what to do at first; then, one afternoon when she had finished the shopping, she had stayed on in the village, wandering about like a tourist, taking it all in. The church, the two pubs, the school. The large well-kept green, with its row of chestnut trees on the south side. This was her home, but she had never really felt like a local. Her father had come to the place as a young man; she had gone to the school, and her mother had stood in the queue at the butcher's with all the other women, picking out cuts of meat at one counter, then going over to the kiosk at the back to pay. In those days, the people who prepared the meat didn't handle money, and she had liked that, the way they kept it all separate. The butcher had been a good man, friendly to her mother, always offering a kind word and picking out the best cuts for her, but his wife had been mean and silent as she took the money, and sometimes she had kept it a little longer in her hand, staring at it, as if she thought it might be some kind of foreign currency. That was how they were, back then. They hadn't liked having a stranger in their midst, and they liked it even less when one of their own took it into her head to marry him. Those people were gone now, and the man who served the chops and sausages took her credit card without a second glance.

At four o'clock, the church clock chimed, and she was about to go back to the car when she thought of the community center. There was a café there, and she remembered that they had activities: flower arranging and Italian classes, Toc H, the Women's Institute. She didn't see herself as the W.I. type, and she wasn't even sure what Toc H was, but she walked to the center anyway, and scrutinized the no-

tice boards in the foyer, the timetables for events and classes neatly pinned out in rows among notices for Brownies and photographs of children in karate whites. She considered yoga, because she thought it would be relaxing, but she quickly dismissed the image of herself in a leotard. On Wednesday nights they had a beginners' class in French, which she'd studied in school but completely forgotten, and she had more or less decided that this was the class for her when she saw a small white postcard, set apart from the rest, announcing that the bell-ringing club was looking for new members. Everyone welcome, it said; no experience needed.

If someone had asked Eva Lowe to imagine a typical bell ringer, she would have pictured some churchy spinster in a hand-knitted cardigan and brogues, or maybe a man in a tweed hat and one of those army-navy-store sweaters that all the keen hikers wore when they climbed the Ben, but, reading that notice, she had a sudden notion of herself in a bell tower, standing in a circle of like-minded souls, the kindly faces touched with a warm, coppery lamplight, the bells ringing out over the stillness of the churchyard as the people of the village settled to their dinners or rose from their beds and made ready for Sunday service. She wasn't a religious person, as such, but she had always liked the church for its own sake, especially when it was lit with candles on Christmas Eve or brimming with sheaves of barley and ripe fruit at harvest time. As a child, she had sometimes walked around the graveyard during lunch break, when the other kids were playing, and she had made a point of reading all the names on the stones. Her father had told her off for that: God was a lie, he said, and Heaven was a myth. Yet Eva thought the place had less to do with God and his angels than with an ordinary, and understandable, desire to have things continue as they had always done. Easter, Harvest, Christmas: it all went round, forever and ever, and nothing could change that. It was a pagan desire, she thought, and it was a pagan place: a dark garden of yews and straggling roses and, at its center, the stone church, with its altar and its font and, above it all, the bells,

suspended in the chill air of the belfry, heavy and still, waiting to be brought to life. It surprised her, all these thoughts running through her head as she stood there, reading the postcard. She took out her shopping list and jotted down the relevant contact details.

It turned out that the organizer was someone she had known in school, and though the woman seemed not to remember Eva, she had been very kind, and the other bell ringers gentle and considerate, always ready to help her out, never noticing when she got things wrong. Matt had laughed when she told him. He'd come home three weeks after she started, and after listening to her talk about it for a couple of minutes he'd just shaken his head.

"Well, I'm glad you've found something you like," he said. "To be honest, I think you're crackers, but if it keeps you happy." He'd noticed that she was annoyed then, and stopped talking, but he hadn't tried to undo the damage. He wasn't that interested. Whenever he was home, he would spend hours on the phone or go out to the pub with his old crowd; then he would be off again. Eva hadn't expected him to understand, but she was still hurt that he could be so dismissive. Hurt, and then, when she talked to Martha about it, angry, because Martha had been angry and that had made Eva's anger seem more justified. Martha had been supportive, not just understanding that Eva needed a hobby but getting it—getting, without having to be told, the whole thing about the lighted church and the belfry and that magical resonance of the bells ringing out over the fields and the village green. But, then, that was how Martha had been from the first. She had understood how Eva felt about the house and, even though she was just as proud of her family history as Matt was, she could see how all that Lowe mythology might make an outsider feel uncomfortable. Eva had been impressed by that, and later, as they had got to know each other, she had been gladdened by the idea that someone she knew, a friend, almost a sister, was on her side.

So it had come as a shock, that morning, when Martha more or less announced that she was having an affair. She hadn't intended the revelation to be

shocking, of course; she'd even tried to make light of it as they sat in the kitchen over a glass of wine. Eva didn't normally drink in the daytime, but, maybe because it was so close to Christmas, she had fetched a bottle of white wine out of the fridge, instead of doling out the usual coffee and biscuits, and Martha had opened up after her second glass, talking about how unhappy she was with James, and how tired she was of being taken for granted.

"I'll pretend to other people," she had said. "But I won't go on pretending to myself." She wasn't terribly upset; she wasn't even that emotional. Most of the time, when people talked about their problems, Eva thought, they were working things out as they went along, looking for the reaction that would justify whatever decision they were hoping to reach—but Martha wasn't like that. She had thought it all through beforehand, and was now simply confirming what she had decided. "A person can die from lack of . . ." She considered a moment.

Eva was worried, afraid she was about to hear something embarrassing, but she didn't say anything. She didn't want to interrupt.

"Contact," Martha said at last, with grim satisfaction. She gave Eva a curious look, as if she wanted to ask her something, then she let it go. "I'm not talking about sex here," she said. "Or not *just* sex. I'm talking about *contact*. A hug, a touch—that's all." She thought for a moment, and gave a soft laugh. "All right," she said. "I am talking about sex."

Eva laughed, though she wasn't amused. "But what about James?" she said.

Martha waved her hand. "To hell with James," she said. When she was annoyed, she looked older, and not so attractive—something she obviously knew, because she bowed her head. Then, after a moment of quiet, she spoke, her head still bowed. "It's not as if it's going anywhere," she said. She looked up, and her face was calm again, composed. "It's just one of those things. I didn't plan on it. It just happened."

Eva didn't know what to say. She remembered Martha telling her once that James was constitutionally mean, and she wondered whether he suspected

anything. He was a big man, with large hands and a cruel mouth, a man used to getting his own way, at any price—a man like Matt, in fact. Casual and charming, but careless of others, steeped in quiet judgment and long-term calculation, his life a fixed agenda that, no matter what happened, would continue on its set course, to whatever end he had decided he deserved. If James found out about the affair, he wouldn't go out with a kitchen knife looking for Martha and her lover; he would find much finer ways—legal ways—to make their lives miserable.

Martha smiled, but she was far away, lost in her own thoughts. "It's not as if it's going to change anything," she said, more to herself than to anyone else. It was a minute or so before she looked back at Eva. "You only live once, right?" she said.

Eva shook her head and stood up. Suddenly, she had to do something. She knew Martha would take it badly, but she needed to be out of the house, away from the ancestors in the walls, listening in on Martha's confession, away from the thought of Matt and of what he would think if he knew what his sister was up to. Worse, what he would do if he discovered that Eva had known about it from the start. She picked up her glass and carried it over to the sink. "My God, look at the time," she said, aware of how awkward this di-

version was, of how inconsiderate she was being. She turned and gave Martha a quick glance. She felt guilty, but she was annoyed, too, because she didn't want to be in on this secret—or maybe it was because she didn't want to have to think about all this, about contact and affairs and things that just happen.

Martha looked more surprised than upset. "Is there somewhere you have to be?" she asked.

"I'm sorry," Eva said. "I just . . . I'm going to be late for bell ringing." She looked away quickly, blinking back tears that she hadn't expected—and the fact that she was about to cry was somehow the worst of it all, a self-imposed humiliation.

Martha's expression didn't change; if anything, she appeared to be more concerned for Eva than with her own problems. "I'm sorry," she said. "I shouldn't have told you about it. It's not fair." She looked at her glass and saw that it was nearly empty. She sat back, and smiled ruefully. "Some secrets are better kept secret," she said.

Eva shook her head. "It's not that," she said. "I hope you'll be . . . happy."

Martha laughed. "Well, I doubt that," she said, with just a hint of a hard edge in her voice. She gave Eva a long look, then she shook her head and laughed again. "I doubt anybody will come out of this *happy*," she said.

Before Eva could think better of it,



"We may have to leave you if there's a parade."

she had spoken, and though she didn't mean it to sound dismissive, she wasn't sorry when it did. "Well, there you go," she said.

Martha froze for a moment and stared at her. Then she laughed again and raised her glass. "There you go," she said, without a trace of mockery or dismissal. "There you go, indeed." She tossed back the wine and poured herself another glass. "And God bless us, every one," she said, as she rose, fetched her coat from the hat stand, and made herself ready to go.

When Eva arrived at the church, the others were already there, though she wasn't as late as she feared, and they had not begun without her. Nobody said much, but then they never did. Nobody inquired about family or work. She knew these people only as they were in this place, a group of like-minded souls, equals in discretion, united by a common tact. The world outside and what they did there was another matter altogether. Richard, Catherine, Grace, Simon, John: as soon as they put on their coats and scarves and—yes, it so happened that some of them, at least, fitted the image she'd had of them that first day—their tweed caps and bicycle clips, they seemed to dwindle away, the light going out of their faces, their secret selves discarded for their return to the outside world. It had come as a surprise to her, those first few weeks: the reason she had joined the group had been to make new friends, but now she was grateful that nobody here wanted to do anything but gather at the appointed time, ring the bells, and go home.

The one exception was Harley. He was the newest member of the group, and he was nothing like the others. He'd been a welcome addition to the company: young, casually dressed, and very good-looking, he was an American student from Illinois, or Iowa, or some such place. No doubt, he had come along the first time out of curiosity, because bell ringing struck him as quaint and Olde Worlde, like warm beer or clootie dumpling, and thus one of the experiences it would be a shame to miss while he was over here. He'd

taken to it, though, and the group had accommodated him easily, in spite of his youth and his accent and his fondness for sweatshirts with oddly unsettling slogans printed across the front. Catherine was particularly considerate of him, bringing in brown paper bags full of apples from her garden and Tupperware containers of mince pies to share with his housemates. She was old enough to be his mother, but Eva wasn't so sure her attentions were wholly maternal. Harley was always polite with her, in the way that Americans are: doggedly courteous and, at the same time, utterly remote, like the landing party in an old episode of "Star Trek," curious and well-meaning and occasionally bewildered, but sworn not to interfere in the everyday life of their hosts.

For her own part, Eva was as scrupulously polite with Harley as he was with her—and just as distant. Yet there were times when she imagined—not sex, of course, nothing so vivid, but a shared moment of some kind. A picnic, say, on Balcomie Law, or a long walk in the woods by Lathockar. In these imaginings, they never touched—not because Harley didn't excite her but because she'd suddenly discovered that she was superstitious, and she was afraid to imagine what she most desired, afraid even to wonder what it might be. As soon as she did, it would fall away into the realm of the impossible. That afternoon, however, she couldn't help thinking about what Martha had said, and as

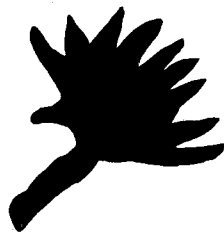
Harley moved back and forth in the dim space of the bell tower she noticed how beautiful his hands were: fine, almost delicate, not large and heavy, like other men's hands, but strong nevertheless, like a pianist's or a dancer's.

Of course, as soon as the notion entered her mind she did everything she could to extinguish it, because she didn't want to think about him in that way. Yet she kept coming back to him: to his dark eyes, to the way he carried himself, and, time and again, before she could stop herself, to the beauty of his hands. Hands she wanted to feel on her skin, light and slow and graceful; not heavy, never heavy, but gentle the way a bird is when it alights on a branch or

a stone, resting for a moment but never entirely settled, always light, always about to take off.

And all this time, as she thought about Harley, the bells rang out over the snowy land. The bell ringers were continuing a tradition that had once been central to the life of the community, and she liked to think that only a generation ago, whenever these bells had rung out over the fields and the streets, everyone had known what they were saying. A call to worship; a royal wedding; an armistice; an enemy attack. Everyone would have understood those signals, because those were the public events, those were the facts. Yet surely there had been something else, another music inside the public proclamations, and there must have been those who could hear more than the facts, gifted listeners who could pick out the subtleties in the way one bell worked against the others, say, or in the pauses when one ringer stopped, weary or undecided, or touched with the knowledge of imminent mortality. Now the bells were nothing but background—pure atmosphere, a little local color—but perhaps there were still souls in this very parish who could decipher the inner workings of a bell ringer's mind, just by listening. If such souls existed, they might know everything about her: the lie of her marriage, her secret thoughts about Harley, her half-formed plans to get away. With every pull on the bell rope, she might be confiding everything to some old man in the almshouses at the far end of the village, or to some dying woman in one of the cottages out by the woods; some seasoned listener who would set aside a book or a pile of darning and listen awhile, wondering who it was that was giving herself away. It frightened her, that notion, but it pleased her, too, because she wanted to proclaim the truth, she wanted to reveal who she really was: not the good and faithful wife she pretended to be but someone else, someone interrupted. That was what she wanted to say—not to confess but to proclaim to all the land.

It was snowing again as she left the church. Over the green, the lights had come on in the shops, the usual gold and white mixed with the Christmas decorations, red and green and a pale, other-



winter showcase

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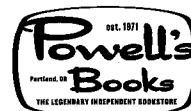
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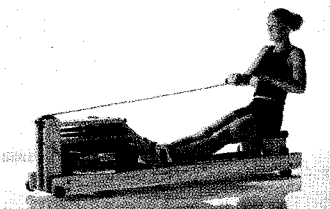
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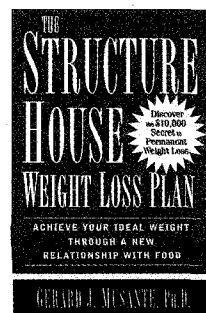
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"No... ha-ha, no, but seriously, boy, I'm going to have to eat you now."

worldly blue around the doors and windows of the butcher's and the green-grocer's. Eva was dreading Christmas now: James and Martha would come over, as usual, and she would have to sit in that house with them, pretending everything was normal, drinking sherry while the men talked, passing round the mince pies and trying not to be offended by Matt's jokes about her baking. This year, she decided, she would buy mince pies from the new delicatessen, the one that sold Polish sausage and French cheese, just to see if anybody noticed the difference. Better still, she would just disappear, maybe go out for a walk in the woods by herself. She would leave a trail of footprints in the snow, and when she got to the end of the track she would look back, the way her father had always done on their winter walks when she was a girl—and it struck her that she'd never really allowed herself time to go back to the woods, or out to the meadows where her father had sometimes led her, in the dusk of a summer's evening, to look at moths, naming them, first in the lan-

guage he had been obliged to learn as a young man, the only language Eva knew, and then in his mother's tongue, being careful to match the two, even though the moths they found, ash gray and soft on the barks of the trees and the stones, were local to this place and only distantly related to those he had known as a boy.

"You O.K.?"

Eva turned and saw Harley in the shelter of the porch behind her, his coat buttoned up to the neck, a thick woollen crew cap pulled down over his ears. She remembered that he'd told her once that he was accustomed to cold weather, where he was from. She wished she knew what kind of region it was, whether it was prairie or forest, or just mile after mile of suburb or strip mall, like the America on television crime shows. She nodded. "I was just thinking we'd get a white Christmas this year," she said. "But then I suppose you're used to that, where you live."

He grinned. "Oh, we get plenty of snow, all right," he said. "Masses of it." He paused for a moment, and Eva thought

she saw something in his face: a memory, or maybe a trace of homesickness. It made him seem preoccupied, like someone who knows he has lost something and can't remember what it is. Maybe it was a girl. There would be a girl, of course; a pretty girl in Illinois, or Iowa, a girl with long dark hair and reading glasses that she wore only when she wanted to look serious. Pretty and smart, and funny. A smart, funny girl who talked more than he did, which was why he loved her, or maybe why she loved him.

"Will you be going home for Christmas?" she asked.

He looked puzzled, as if her question were terribly personal and inappropriate, then his face brightened. "Oh, no," he said. "I'm planning to travel around, maybe go to Paris."

"Paris?" For some reason, the idea shocked her. She had wanted to think of him at home, with his family and his girl, not alone in some foreign city, among strangers. "Really?"

He laughed. "I don't know," he said. "Maybe Paris, maybe somewhere else." He poked his head out from under the shelter of the porch and looked up into the falling snow. "Maybe I'll just stay here," he said.

Eva shook her head. "Oh, don't do that," she said. "Go to Paris. Go skiing or something, but don't stay here."

Harley laughed again, then he saw how serious she looked and he nodded. Eva tried to smile then, because she knew she had given something away, but she couldn't, because she suddenly felt sorry for him, and for the pretty, smart girl in Iowa, with her books and her reading glasses. She knew how ridiculous that was, and she wanted to shrug it off, to stop being such a fool—and maybe Harley sensed that, because he touched her, his hand alighting on her coat sleeve and lingering for a moment before he took it away. "I have to go," he said. "Have a nice evening, O.K.?"

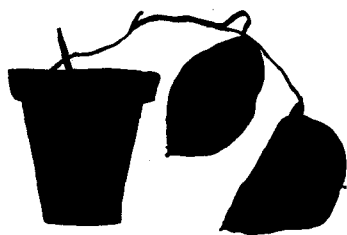
Eva nodded, and this time she did smile, but Harley was already moving away, loping off toward the gate in his winter coat, the snow clinging to his coat sleeves and the wool cap as he stepped out onto the pavement and headed across the green. Eva knew that she should go, too, but she couldn't bring herself to drive home to her hus-

band's house, and she lingered in the porch awhile, watching the snow as it fell through the shop lights on the far side of the green. Harley was gone; he had vanished suddenly and she was surprised, because he'd just been there, crossing the green, heading to the row of shops opposite. She didn't know where he lived, but she knew it was in a shared house somewhere outside the village, probably on the west side, out by the woods. It would be a half mile or so, maybe more, and it struck her that she should have offered him a lift. But he was used to the cold and, besides, it would have been dangerous to get into a car with him and drive up through the Kinaldy woods in the snow. Out there alone with him, in the dark, with snow falling all around them, she might have said something she would have regretted.

But then he didn't appear on the far side of the green, and she wondered where he'd gone—not because she wanted to give in to the temptation to catch up with him and drive him home to his warm house but out of simple curiosity. That was what made her step out into the snow and walk to the gate. It was like watching a conjurer perform a magic trick, when you shouldn't really care, because you know it's an illusion, but you just have to figure out how it's done. Only she couldn't figure it out, because Harley wasn't there. He was gone. The others were gone, too, all but Catherine, who was putting something into the boot of her car twenty yards farther along, and there was nobody in the shops opposite but the people who worked there—the girl in the greengrocer's, come round from behind the counter to stare out at the falling snow, the butcher in his white coat, clearing away the slabs of beef and lamb after a busy day. Eva felt cheated, as if Harley had tricked her on purpose—and the thought scared her, because, if he had, what reason could there be except that he knew how she

felt about him and was mocking her? Or maybe he'd *wanted* her to look for him, maybe he'd wanted that lift, but couldn't ask, because she was a married woman and he was an outsider. That was ridiculous, of course. The sad truth, surely, was that he'd already forgotten she existed and was on his way home, trudging happily through the snow: a young man, used to the cold, heading for home in a place he would never see again. Surely that was it, Eva told herself—yet she looked for him still, expected him to come back and resume the conversation because he had seen something in her face, something he'd looked for all along.

She stood at the gate, the snow lining the creases in her coat, her face and hands already numb with cold, and she waited to see what would happen, because something would happen—she knew it would. And just as that thought came to her, as if on cue, a familiar car appeared on the far side of the green. It was moving slowly, and the driver's-side window was wound down, so Eva could see that it was Martha, her hair damp from the drifting snow, her face attentive as she gazed across the green toward the trees by the church. For a moment, Eva was annoyed. She assumed that Martha had come for her, and even though it made no sense, even though she didn't want to be drawn back into that morning's conversation, she lifted her hand, lifted it without thinking, and waved. She waved, and then she waved again—but Martha didn't see her, and at that same moment, a few yards off to the left, a dark figure detached itself from the shadow of the big chestnut tree and hurried across, a dark figure that Eva knew from somewhere, though at first she couldn't place it, because it didn't make any sense: a dark figure who became Harley, running around the car and getting in on the passenger side with an air of having done this before. As soon as he was in, the car pulled away, heading out of the village and west, toward the lower woods, where the snow would be thick all night, thick and heavy and, even on the road that ran up to Kinaldy and Lathockar, completely unmarked, except for a line of tire tracks that would soon vanish into whiteness. ♦



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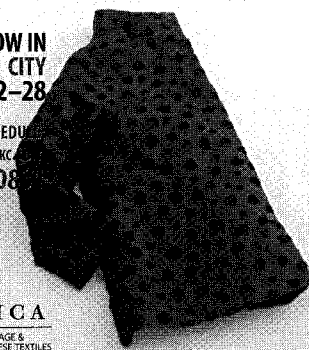
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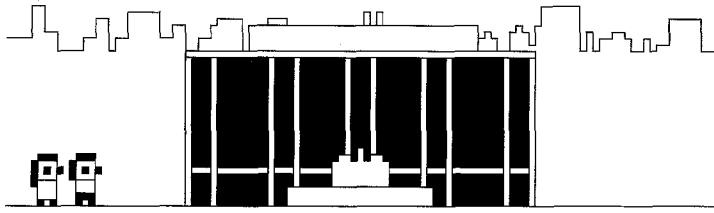
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The plays of Sarah Ruhl.

BY JOHN LAHR

When the playwright Sarah Ruhl works at home, she sits at a desk in her young daughter Anna's bedroom, beside a window overlooking a paddle-tennis court amid a red brick apartment maze on the East Side of Manhattan. A white gate, like a picket fence, stretches across the width of the small room, dividing the toddler's play area from her mother's. Ruhl, who is thirty-four and has already won a half-million-dollar MacArthur Fellowship for her plays (which include "The Clean House," a comedy that was a Pulitzer Prize finalist in 2005), writes in a poised, crystalline style about things that are irrational and invisible. Ruhl is a fabulist. Her plays celebrate what she calls "the pleasure of heightened things." In them, fish walk and caper ("Passion Play"), stones talk and weep ("Eurydice"), a dog is a witness to and the narrator of a family tragedy ("Dog Play"), a woman turns into an almond ("Melancholy Play"). Ruhl's characters occupy, she has said, "the real world and also a suspended state." Her new play, "Dead Man's Cell Phone," now at Playwrights Horizons, is a meditation on death, love, and disconnection in the digital age; like her other works, it inhabits a dramatic netherworld between personal suspense and suspended time. "Cell phones, iPods, wireless computers will change people in ways we don't even understand," Ruhl told me. "We're less connected to the present. No one is where they are. There's absolutely no reason to talk to a stranger

anymore—you connect to people you already know. But how well do you know them? Because you never see them—you just talk to them. I find that terrifying."

Looming over Ruhl's writing table is a poster of a photograph from Walker Evans's late-nineteen-thirties series of New York City subway riders, a gift from her husband, Tony Charuvastra, a child psychiatrist. (They married in 2005, after a seven-year courtship.) The juxtaposition of photographer and playwright—both entrepreneurs of tone and atmosphere—is one of those unconscious visual provocations that Ruhl's plays relish. "I like to see people speaking ordinary words in strange places, or people speaking extraordinary words in ordinary places," Ruhl has said. Evans wanted to project, he wrote, the "delights of seeing"; Ruhl wants to project the delights of pretense, "the interplay between the actual and the magical." Evans once wrote about the "dream of making photographs like poems." Ruhl began her career as a poet—her first book, "Death in Another Country," a collection of verse, was published when she was twenty—and she sees her plays as "three-dimensional poems." Evans's subway photos were taken at furtive angles, with his lens hidden in the buttonhole of his coat and an operating cable up his sleeve; Ruhl's narrative strategy is similarly oblique and cunning, and she aspires to a kind of reportorial anonymity. "If one is unseen, one has the liberty to observe and make things up," she told me. "It's very

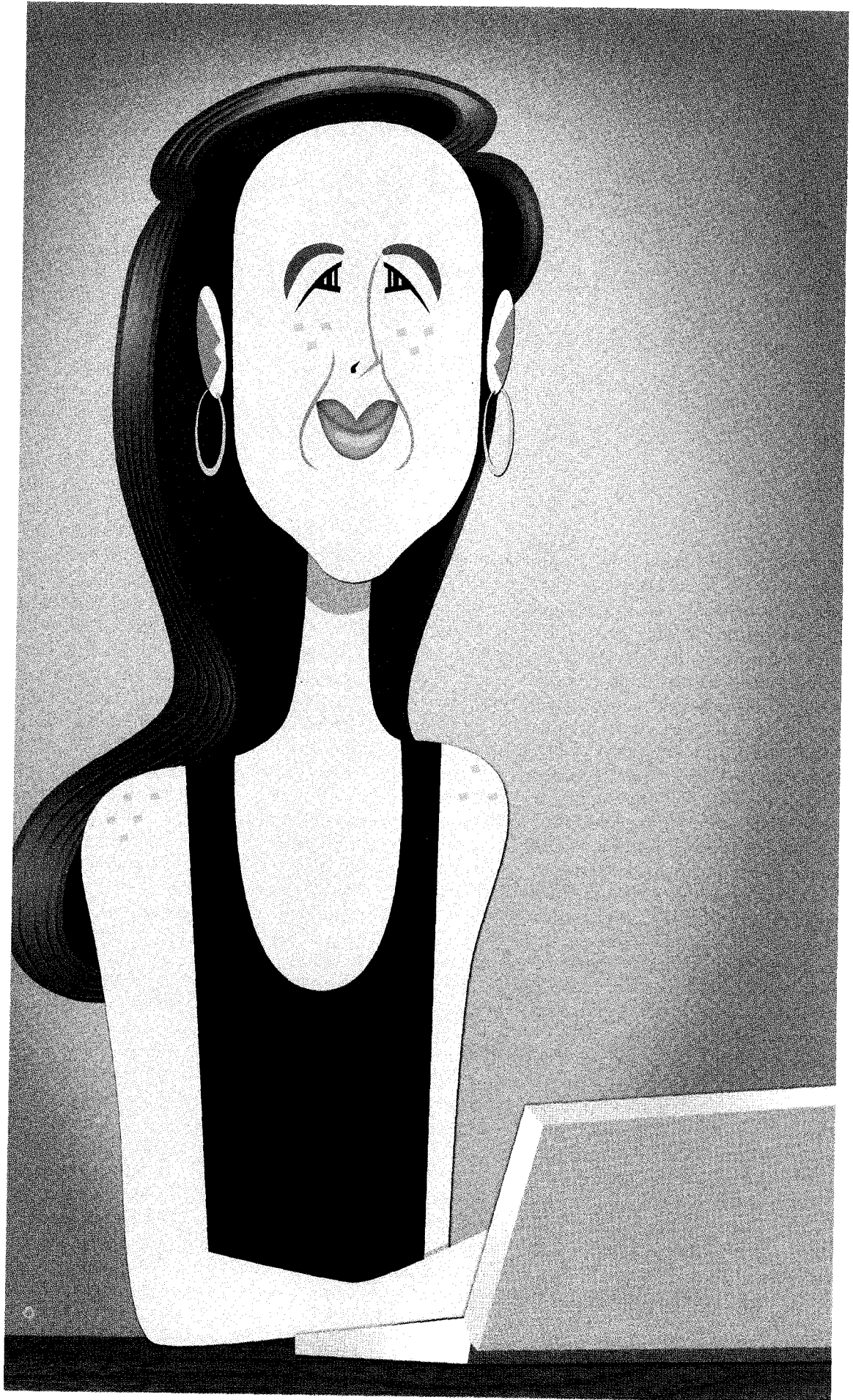
difficult to overhear a conversation if one is speaking loudly." One night, at the Lincoln Center production of "The Clean House"—a tale about an unhappy Brazilian maid looking for the perfect joke in the midst of her employer's family ructions—Ruhl sat unrecognized behind an elderly couple. "I didn't *not* like it," the woman said after the houselights came up. "I didn't *not* like it," her gentleman friend chimed in. "They turned to me," Ruhl recalled, and asked, "What did you think?" I said, "I didn't *not* like it, either."

Ruhl, like her plays, is deceptively placid. She is petite and polite. Her voice is high-pitched, as if she had been hitting the helium bottle. She wears her auburn hair pinned back by a barrette, in demure schoolmarm fashion; in her choice of clothes, too, she favors an unprepossessing look—a carapace of ordinariness, forged out of her Illinois childhood and "the ability of Midwesterners to pulverize people who seem slightly precocious," she explained. ("In third grade, somebody sent me a poison-pen letter," Ruhl, who was bullied for being intelligent, said. "I corrected the punctuation and sent it back.") Nothing in her modest mien indicates her steeliness, her depth, or her piquant wit. Ruhl is reserved but not shy, alert but not aggressive. She feels big emotions; she just doesn't express them in a big way. "I had one boyfriend who really wished I would yell and scream at him," she said. Even her laugh is just three short, unobtrusive intakes of breath.

But if Ruhl's demeanor is unassuming, her plays are bold. Her nonlinear form of realism—full of astonishments, surprises, and mysteries—is low on exposition and psychology. "I try to interpret how people subjectively experience life," she has said. "Everyone has a great, horrible opera inside him. I feel that my plays, in a way, are very old-fashioned. They're pre-Freudian in the sense that the Greeks and Shakespeare worked with similar assumptions. Catharsis isn't a wound being excavated from childhood."

Lightness—the distillation of things into a quick, terse, almost innocent directness—is a value on which Ruhl puts much weight. "Italo Calvino has an essay that I think is profound," she told me, scouting a floor-length living-room

Ruhl says that she likes her actors to have "a sense of irony," and to be "touched with a little brush of the irrational."





bookshelf until she found Calvino's "Six Memos for the Next Millennium," a series of posthumously published lectures on the imaginative qualities that the new millennium should call into play. Of his defining categories—among them quickness, exactitude, visibility, and multiplicity—lightness is foremost. "In the even more congested times that await us, literature must aim at the maximum concentration of poetry and of thought," he writes. Ruhl, in her plays, contends with the pressing existential issues; her stoical comic posture is a means of killing gravity, of taking the heaviness out of her words in order to better contend with life. "Lightness isn't stupidity," she said. "It's actually a philosophical and aesthetic viewpoint, deeply serious, and has a kind of wisdom—stepping back to be able to laugh at horrible things even as you're experiencing them." In "Melancholy Play" (2002), a farce about suffering, Ruhl dramatized the point. Among a group of sad sacks, who are gourmands of grief—they fight over "a vial of tears"—a bank teller named Tilly causes havoc when she pronounces herself happy. "I feel lighter and lighter," Tilly says. "I am trying to cultivate—a sensation of—gravity. But nothing helps."

Lightness, Ruhl said, was "probably a family style." She grew up in Wilmette, Illinois, where she had "a wonderful family. I'm not like a lot of artists in that way." Her father, Patrick, marketed toys for a

number of years, a job that was a mismatch for his intellectual abilities. "He should have been a history professor," Ruhl said, though he loved puns, reading, language, and jazz. "I think Sarah's appreciation of music comes from him," her older sister, Kate Ruhl, a psychiatrist, told me. So, too, did her fascination with language. Each Saturday, from the time Ruhl was five, Patrick took his daughters to the Walker Bros. Original Pancake House for breakfast and taught them a new word, along with its etymology. (The language lesson and some of Patrick's words—"ostracize," "peripatetic," "defunct"—are memorialized in the 2003 "Eurydice," a retelling of the Orpheus myth from his innamorata's point of view, in which the dead Father, reunited with his daughter, tries to re-teach her lost vocabulary.) Patrick died of cancer in 1994, when Ruhl was twenty. That year, because he was ill, the family had to forgo its usual summer trip to Cape Cod; instead, as Kate recalled, "we brought Cape Cod to our house. We pretended we were away—we would watch dumb summer movies, get the kid food we ate on the Cape. We were a really good foursome." Ruhl, recollecting her father's last days, said, "He'd be making jokes about having radioactive urine. We'd all be laughing. It was so gracious."

Ruhl's mother, Kathleen, who now holds a Ph.D. in Language, Literacy, and Rhetoric, from the University of Illinois,

added to the family's sense of caprice. For most of her children's growing up, Kathleen was a high-school English teacher who moonlighted as an actress and a director. She would come down to dinner—according to Ruhl, who calls her "vivid"—"doing the maid's speech from Ionesco's 'Bald Soprano.'" Ruhl said, "We were encouraged to play at home, so that art-making didn't seem like an escape from family or a retreat but very much a part of life." Even Kathleen's method of inculcating manners was a license to play. "We had Pig Night," Kathleen said. "One night a week, the girls could be as horrible as they wanted. The rest of the week, they had to make an effort." The Ruhl children knew all about performance. They were taken on summer pilgrimages to Stratford, Ontario, to see Shakespeare. Ruhl has memories of being bewildered and furious, watching "Julius Caesar" ("lots of white togas") and going backstage after "The Tempest" to look at the ship ("That was magical"). Kathleen would also tote them to her rehearsals. Even as a girl, Ruhl, who was considered an "old soul" by her family, had a keen analytic eye. "One of the most intense theatrical experiences for her was when I directed 'Enter Laughing,'" Kathleen said. "She got to know all the actors. By that point, people would ask her for her notes. She was six or seven."

"When other kids were outside playing, Sarah would be wrapped in a comforter drinking tea and reading," Kate said. "We used to joke that she had consumption." Ruhl told me, "There was always a little part of me that stood apart and observed and made things up. My mom says that, even before I could write, I would tell stories and she would type them up for me." Then as now, storytelling worked as an antidepressant for her. "If I'm sad in life, I'll tell someone something strange and funny that happened to me to make myself feel better," she said. The thrill of transformation is something she began learning at the age of ten, through improvisational games at the Piven Theatre, a seventy-seat venue in Evanston, Illinois, whose Young People's Company, to which Ruhl briefly belonged, can claim such accomplished graduates as John Cusack, Joan Cusack, Jeff Garlin, and Rosanna Arquette. Joyce Piven, the co-founder and artistic director, told me, "We acted stories, myths,

fairly tales, folktales, then literary tales—Chekhov, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, Salinger.” The theatre, Ruhl said, “didn’t use props, and didn’t have sets. Language did everything. So, from an early age: no fourth wall, and things can transform in the moment.” As an improviser, according to Piven, Ruhl “wasn’t a standout—she’s not basically a performer.” (Ruhl concurs: “I don’t like being watched.”) But she began taking Piven’s scene-study class, and ended up teaching the work. “She hears the play in all its dimensions,” Piven said, adding, “She writes from a distance, so she can play. Even if you’re writing about a very serious thing and invested up to your eyes, intensity can kill a lot for the actor and the writer.”

Apart from a courtroom drama about a land-mass dispute between an isthmus and an island, which Ruhl wrote in fourth grade, and which her teacher declined to stage—“Perhaps that’s why I’m writing plays now, to exorcize my psychic battle with Mr. Spangenberg,” Ruhl says—she didn’t start writing plays until her junior year at Brown University, in 1995. In “Dog Play,” her first piece, a ten-minute exercise assigned by her teacher, the playwright Paula Vogel, Ruhl synthesized Kabuki stage techniques with a suburban American environment to evoke her grief over her father’s death. The Dog, whose baying “as though his heart is breaking” opens the show, says, “I dreamed last night that I could speak and everyone could understand. I was telling them that he is not dead, that I can see him. No one believed me.” Vogel, who later cited Ruhl in her award-winning play “Baltimore Waltz” as one of the people “who had changed the way I looked at drama,” told me, “I sat with this short play in my study and sobbed. She had an emotional maturity that no one else in the class had.” Vogel added, “I said, ‘I want to work with you,’ and she answered, ‘Well, I’m going to be a poet. I’m not gonna be doing playwriting.’ My heart kind of sank, but I went, ‘Well, O.K. Good luck.’” But Vogel’s appreciation of Ruhl’s work prevailed. “I do think it’s important having someone say, ‘You could do this for life,’” Ruhl said. “Paula was that person.”

Ruhl spent the next year at Pembroke College, Oxford, where she studied English literature, and when she returned her sights were not on poetry but on playwriting. Her literary volte-face was due in

part to her confusion about the confessional “I” of her poetic voice, which she felt had been exhausted in mourning her father. In “Dream,” for instance, she wrote, “I wake this morning and gather a mouthful of dirt—/ words—with a teaspoon, that you may speak to me again.” “I didn’t know what a poem should be anymore,” she said. “Plays provided a way to open up content and have many voices. I felt that onstage one could speak lyrically and with emotion, and that the actor was longing for that kind of speech, whereas in poetic discourse emotion was in some circles becoming embarrassing.”

The turning point for Ruhl came in 1997, at a production of “Passion Play,” her first full-length work, which Vogel had arranged at Trinity Repertory Company, in Providence, Rhode Island. Kathleen drove herself and Sarah to the event. They had an accident, and Sarah was briefly knocked unconscious. Nonetheless, she managed to see her play. “At a visceral level, watching the play, I thought, This is it,” she said. “Some people stood. What whorish playwright wouldn’t be excited about that? It was momentous and strange.”

Ruhl’s theatre aspires to reclaim the audience’s atrophied imagination. “Now, some people consume imagination, and some people do the imagining,” she said. “I find it very worrisome. That should be one thing that people know they can do.” Ruhl writes with space, sound, and image as well as words. Her stage directions often challenge her directors’ scenic imagination as well. In “Eurydice,” the dead Father builds Eurydice a room of string in the underworld. The stage directions read, “*He makes four walls and a door out of string. / Time passes. / It takes time to build a room out of string.*” Ruhl’s goal is to make the audience live in the moment, to make the known world unfamiliar in order to reanimate it. Here the essential nature of the underworld—its sense of absence—is made visceral by the volumes of meticulously constructed empty space that the string defines.

“I’m interested in the things theatre can do that other forms can’t,” Ruhl told me. “So theatre as pure plumbing of self,

in a psychological way, seems very readily to me.” Her plays are distinguished by a minimum of backstory; the audience is submerged in a series of unfolding dramatic moments. “Eurydice,” for instance, opens, wittily, with Eurydice and Orpheus at the beach. When Orpheus offers her the world, it’s the real one. “All those birds. Thank you,” Eurydice says. “And the sea! For me? When? Now? It’s mine already? (*Orpheus nods.*) Wow.” The dialogue and the situation have precise, ironic resonances, but the audience has to work for them. The play coaxes the spectators to swim in the magical, sometimes menacing flow of the unconscious. Ruhl prefers the revelations of the surreal moment to the narrated psychological one. In the prologue to “Passion Play”—a triptych that uses for its dissection of faith, politics, and political icons the organizing conceit of the staging of Christ’s Passion in separate acts by the Elizabethans, Nazi-era Germans, and contemporary Americans—Ruhl announced her daring, playfully cajoling the public to focus on the moment and the mythic:

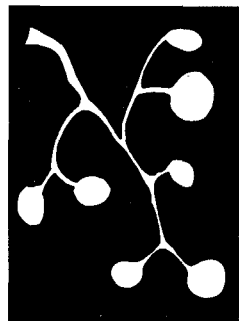
We ask you, dear audience,
To use your eyes, ears, your most inward sight.
For here is day (*A painted sun is raised*)
And here is night (*A painted moon is raised*)
And now, the play.

As a storyteller, Ruhl marches to Ovid’s drum rather than Aristotle’s. “Aristotle has held sway for many centuries, but I feel our culture is hungry for

Ovid’s way of telling stories,” she said, describing Ovid’s narrative strategy as “one thing transforming into another.” She went on, “His is not the neat Aristotelian arc but, instead, small transformations that are delightful and tragic.” And she added, “The Aristotelian model—a person wants

something, comes close to getting it but is smashed down, then finally gets it, or not, then learns something from the experience—I don’t find helpful. It’s a strange way to look at experience.

“I like plays that have revelations in the moment, where emotions transform almost inexplicably,” Ruhl said. “The acting style isn’t explicated, either. It’s not psychological.” In “The Clean



House,” for instance, one stage direction reads, “*Lane cries. She laughs. She cries. She laughs. And this goes on for some time.*” To Ruhl, this kind of emotionally labile performance is a “virtuosic” exhibition of behavior. “It feels true to me,” she said. “Children are certainly that way. I’m interested in these kinds of state changes. I was happy, now I’m sad.” She continued, “If you distill people’s subjectivity and how they view the world emotionally, you don’t get realism.” The irrationality of emotion is one of the themes to which Ruhl’s plays continually return. “I don’t want to smooth out the emotions to the point where you could interpret them totally rationally, so that they have a clear reference point to the past,” she said. “Psychological realism makes emotions so rational, so explained, that they don’t feel like emotions to me.”

In Ruhl’s plays, turbulent feeling can erupt at any moment, for no apparent reason; actors are challenged to inhabit the emotional moment without motivation. Sometimes, during rehearsal, an anxious actor will approach Ruhl to try and pin down the role. She thinks to herself, “Oh, come on, just ride it.” She told me, “I prefer an actor who says, ‘My character doesn’t have a backstory, so I won’t concoct one. I will live as fully in every moment as I can. I will let the language move me, as opposed to a secret backstory of my own.’ She likes her actors to have ‘a sense of irony,’ and to be ‘touched with a little brush of the irrational.’”

One afternoon in January, in the fifth-floor rehearsal room of Playwrights Horizons, Ruhl took a seat beside the director Anne Bogart at the top of a horseshoe of white Formica tables. It was the second day of rehearsal for “Dead Man’s Cell Phone.” Behind them was the maquette of the play’s spare proscenium set—its backdrop of sky and its sliding side panels painted in the deep, sombre blues, grays, and browns of Edward Hopper’s palette. The Hopper tones suggested the longing and the solitude that are the play’s internal weather and that the cavernous, mostly furniture-free space magnified. As an epigram to her script, Ruhl appended an observation by Mark Strand about the people who wait in Hopper’s paintings: “They are

like characters whose parts have deserted them and now, trapped in the space of their waiting, must keep themselves company.”

“Dead Man’s Cell Phone” is a mad pilgrimage of an imagination as it is invaded and atomized by the phone, which transforms private as well as public space. At a café, when a man sitting next to the quirky Jean won’t answer the intrusive ringing of his phone, she answers it herself, realizing only slowly that the man is dead. In the moment of recognition, staring into his transfigured face, which appears, the stage direction reads, “*as though he was just looking at something he found eminently beautiful,*” Jean falls in love. “I can be very medieval about love—like the notion that love is through the eyes and that it’s very immediate, as opposed to modern and neurotic,” Ruhl told me. Jean speaks to the corpse; the stage direction reads, “*She holds his hand. She keeps hold of it.*” In the image, Ruhl’s main thematic tragicomic preoccupations of being both disembodied and disconnected coalesce. To keep alive the reality of her newfound love object, Jean answers his calls and fabricates stories about his dying thoughts to lovers, business partners, and family, all of whom she eventually meets. (The Dead Man’s name, it turns out, is Gordon, and he sold body parts for a living.)

Of the many ghostly figures in this bright play—Jean, who declares, “I like to disappear”; Gordon’s termagant mother, who sees it as her job “to mourn him until the day I die”; Dwight, an unnoticed second son—the Dead Man is the only bona-fide ghost. This being a Ruhl play, he is, naturally, heard from.

“Have a seat,” Bogart said to Bill Camp, the actor who was then playing the Dead Man. “Take your time. And see if we might help you, or not.” The Dead Man has a soliloquy at the opening of Act II, and Bogart was planting the seed of using the audience as an acting partner in the scene. Ruhl is a fan of direct address. In “Melancholy Play,” her production notes admonish theatricals: “The audience knows the difference between being talked to and being talked at. Talk to them, please.” Ruhl told me, “We’re in the theatre and people are speaking to us. You could say it’s more real.” She said to Camp, “There is charm in the monologue—the slow, easy charm

of talking to an airplane partner in first class. Don’t be afraid of it.”

“I love that image of being in first class,” Bogart said. Then Camp got to work. “I woke up that morning—the day I died—thinking I’d like a lobster bisque,” he began. Ruhl cast out her sentences straight and true like a fly line, their rhythms setting ideas down crisply and carefully for her listeners to catch. Sometimes she did it with a fillip of observation (“I got onto the subway. A tomb for people’s eyes”); sometimes with a flick of humor (“It doesn’t really make your mouth water, does it, lentil soup?” Gordon asks. “Something watery—something brown—and hot carrots. Like death”); sometimes with the surprise of information (“Ate my sushi,” Gordon says, in a detour about a restaurant run by a former Chinese surgeon who did organ extractions. “You can tell with tuna whether they slice it from the belly or from the tail end. He always gave me the belly. It’s the good part”). By the point in the soliloquy where Gordon arrives at the café, where he learns that the last bowl of lobster bisque has just been sold, the rhythm and command of Ruhl’s language have slyly let out a lot of the story line. “I’m thinking, That bitch over there ate all the lobster bisque, this is all her fault,” Gordon says as he begins to have a heart attack. “And I look over at her, and she looks like an angel—not like a bitch at all—and I think—good—good—I’m glad she had the last bite—I’m glad. Then I die.”

Afterward, parsing the soliloquy with Camp, Ruhl returned to the sushi-eating story. In the text, she said, it seems that the character is “talking about something important, like organs, when actually it isn’t that important in his moral structure. But sushi is the important part of what he’s talking about. There was something thrilling in the way you were talking about the ‘belly is the best part of the tuna.’ That was the place where you slowed down, even though it was parenthetical. That seemed really right to me.” She added, “This is a man who is used to talking at length and to having people listen. There’s a kind of confidence. He’s allowed to improvise and to surprise himself with language the way most people aren’t, because people stop listening.”

Ruhl takes the same pleasure in lan-

guage. On the way to a preview, eight weeks later, she worried about the calibration of the words in a rewrite of her ending. "I hope I'm not overarticulating," she said, striding through the chill night air in bluejeans, backpack on her shoulders. In the lobby, the director Mark Wing-Davey, who will stage "Passion Play" at the Yale Repertory Theatre later this year, swept Ruhl up against his massive body like a grizzly bear hugging a salmon. "She's a playwright with a voice that thrums," Wing-Davey told me as we took our seats. He went on, "You hear that voice and you think, That doesn't come around that often." Ruhl's theatrical authority bred trust in the audience. In the game of hide-and-seek she played with it, there was always something to be found. It gave them permission to play. No matter how wild the zigzags of logic or the lampoon of conventional storytelling—what she called her "anti-money shots"—the audience was right with Ruhl's flights of goofy fancy: a cell-phone ballet set to the chattering gab of the spheres, a rendezvous with Gordon on his rung of Hell, a redemptive finale. "I intend the ending to be an actual hymn to love," she told me. Out of the atomized half lives of the characters, Ruhl's tale, true to comedy's mission, stage-managed wholeness: Jean says to Dwight, Gordon's brother, "Let's start loving each other right now, Dwight—not a mediocre love, but the strongest love in the world, absolutely requited."

In the lobby after the preview, I talked to Wing-Davey about the oddness of the play's ironic detachment and its unabashed optimism. "Why shouldn't it be?" he said, adding, "Right now Sarah's life is great—a young child, newly married, the darling of the American theatre scene, her plays are done." Nonetheless, for good luck at each opening night, Ruhl comes armed with an amulet, a small pink Ganesh-type elephant. If her sister or her husband is beside her in the theatre, as the lights come down, Ruhl's ritual is to whisper the words of a young, excited, theatre-going Minnesota girl from her favorite childhood series, the "Betsy-Tacy" stories, words that to Ruhl signal "the experience of opening and of forgetting." "The curtain goes up! The curtain goes up!" she says. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

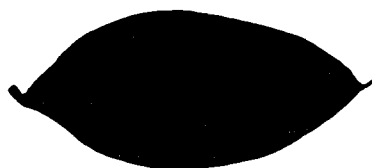
Sharp Teeth, by Toby Barlow (Harper; \$22.95). In a cheeky nod to epic poetry, Barlow's debut novel is written entirely in free verse and concerns a metamorphosis, of humans into wolves, in Los Angeles. No slaves to the moon, these postmodern lycanthropes do a thousand situps at a time and choose when to "self-ignite." (There are lapses: a grease-sensitive type inadvertently commits a massacre at Popeye's.) The story involves a white-collar pack run by a Sun Tzu-style strategist that operates like a cross between a ruthless law firm and the Lakers; a plot to infiltrate animal shelters and high-end bridge tournaments; and a dog catcher who unknowingly falls in love with a werewolfess. Barlow deftly sketches the L.A. landscape—stucco, sun beating through smog, tract-home meth labs, fresh-cut lawns that "hiss with wealth," freeways that devour hours of life—and metes out his tale in noirish koans: "Watch any man's eyes / at the bounce of a ball. / His head tilts slightly sideways, just a hair, / as a primitive focus / comes to life."

Johnny One-Eye, by Jerome Charyn (Norton; \$25.95). Set on Manhattan Island during the Revolutionary War, this leisurely picaresque concerns the adventures of an orphan reared in a brothel who loses an eye when he follows Benedict Arnold into battle. Johnny is a man of both nations; he joins up with Arnold as a secret agent for the British, but his admiration for him is genuine. His feelings are further complicated by his discovery that George Washington—here gentle, intelligent, and tortured by love for the brothel's madam—may be his father, but ultimately his loyalty lies with his true love, an octoroon prostitute named Clara. Charyn skillfully breathes life into historical icons like Arnold, Washington, and Alexander

Hamilton, and constructs a careful plot of shifting alliances, roving spies, and double-dealing.

Ravens in the Storm, by Carl Oglesby (Scribner; \$25). Writing this memoir, Oglesby was able to draw on more than four thousand pages of government intelligence about himself, gathered in the nineteen-sixties during his time as the president of the protest group Students for a Democratic Society. A former defense-industry employee with a high-security clearance, Oglesby became a prominent antiwar figure—he served on an international war-crimes tribunal with Jean-Paul Sartre and was asked to be the Vice-Presidential running mate of the Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver—but he always saw himself as a voice for moderation. This centrist perspective alienated S.D.S.'s militants, including a future leader of the Weathermen, who warned him, "We are not frustrated liberals, Carl. We are enemies of the state." In the end, Oglesby recounts, he was forced out of S.D.S. on charges of rejecting Marxism-Leninism and possibly being a federal agent. His book is a mournful tribute to the spirit of an age gone awry.

The Wagner Clan, by Jonathan Carr (*Atlantic Monthly*; \$27.50). A hundred and twenty-five years after Richard Wagner's death, his descendants still control the annual festival he founded to stage his works. In this engaging group biography, Carr casts the Wagner family business as a "matchless mirror" of the social and political history of Germany itself. The festival may have become the "flagship" of German culture, thanks in part to the patronage of Ludwig II and Hitler, but, as Carr emphasizes, the family is far from ethnically homogeneous: some of its most stridently nationalist members were Britons who married in. Carr's levelheaded and meticulous approach is best displayed in his treatment of the Master's anti-Semitism and the family's links to Hitler, a regular houseguest and devoted fan affectionately referred to as "Uncle Wolf."



GALE FORCE

A new Met production of Britten's "Peter Grimes."

BY ALEX ROSS

Few operas are as rooted in one place as Benjamin Britten's "Peter Grimes," which has rumbled back to the Metropolitan Opera, in a new production by John Doyle. The title character, a dark-souled fisherman who goes mad after his apprentices die, was the invention of the poet George Crabbe, who grew up in Aldeburgh, on the eastern coast of England, in the later eighteenth century, and apparently based Grimes on a detested local character. Montagu Slater, the opera's librettist, wove his elaboration of the tale into various Aldeburgh settings. And Britten, a resident of the same town for most of his adult life, brilliantly evoked its sights and sounds in his music—the crying of gulls, the creaking of buoys, the endless booming of the waves. The obvious way to stage "Grimes" is to re-create Aldeburgh and let Britten's flawless score do the rest. This was the approach taken by Tyrone Guthrie, who first directed the opera at Covent Garden, in 1947, two years after the première, and who later brought a vividly detailed version to the Metropolitan Opera, in 1967. That classic production played at the Met as recently as 1998, and, while it showed its age, it remained a deeply absorbing experience: you were pulled into a kind of tragic picture postcard.

Doyle, celebrated for his recent presentations of "Sweeney Todd" and "Company" on Broadway, has banished the Moot Hall, the nets, the scurrying boys, the lanterns glimmering in fog, and other familiar bits of Grimesiana. Instead, he and his set designer, Scott Pask, confront audiences with a kind of gritty abstraction of coastal life. High wooden walls dominate the stage, their surfaces weathered and sooty. Doors and windows open to disclose various townspeople, their bodies silhouetted against gray-green or sky-blue backgrounds. There are fishermen's hats and other costumes redolent of the sea, but the garb lacks a strong sense of period;

the supporting characters, so vibrantly differentiated in Slater's words and Britten's music, tend to blend in with the chorus. Even Grimes is sometimes hard to pick out from the mass of singers, who keep pressing forward in formation, like a black-clad, puritan army.

It's a handsome-looking show, though it's studiously, perhaps excessively, grim.

much analyzed psychology of Grimes, who may or may not be guilty of abusing his apprentices, but also the psychology of the crowd, which lustily passes judgment on the fisherman without having heard the evidence. And those walled sets serve as a superb sounding board for the chorus, which gave the performance of the night.

Donald Palumbo recently took over as the Met's chorus master, and the wisdom of that choice was already apparent in the "Orfeo ed Euridice" last May. He has taken a gifted ensemble and imposed discipline and direction: fuzzy enthusiasm has given way to precise intensity. In "Grimes," he has done wonders again. At the climax of the work, the townspeople deliver an anthem of rage



As Grimes, Anthony Dean Griffey veered between lyricism and thuggishness.

Britten filled his score with hymns, dances, and delicious little throwaway tunes, which create a rich illusion of daily bustle; without a façade of ordinary life onstage, the explosions of violence lose their shock value. Still, "Grimes" profits from being seen without the usual quaint clutter. You come face to face with the opera's darkest elements: not just the

that includes the line "Him who despises us we'll destroy!" After reaching an initial fortissimo, the dynamics drop to a whisper, and the chorus repeats those words in an obsessive staccato, with the strings playing pizzicato in tandem. On opening night, it was sometimes hard to tell voices and strings apart, and that fusion of choral and orchestral sound sym-

bolized the unanimity of hatred to which Grimes is subjected. Even scarier was the blending of bass voices and horns toward the end of the sequence—a noise like howling wind.

Anthony Dean Griffey, as Grimes, had the challenge of keeping his head above that sea of sound. A lyric tenor of unusual sensitivity, he lacks the ripping dramatic force that was the trademark of the great Jon Vickers, who sang Grimes at the Met some thirty times between 1967 and 1983. But Griffey never failed to make himself heard, and several times he seized attention not with stentorian tones but with a slender thread of lovely sound, as in the abbreviated aria “Now the Great Bear and Pleiades,” in Act I. When Grimes’s propensity toward violence kicked in, Griffey fearlessly veered to the opposite extreme, letting his voice fray into a thuggish rasp. These changes of mood happened so abruptly that some members of the audience jumped. In all, it was a convincing portrayal of a damaged and dangerous man.

Even finer was Patricia Racette’s performance as Ellen Orford, the schoolmistress who tries and fails to rescue Grimes from his anger and self-pity. This character can sometimes come off as annoyingly pure-hearted, a Julie Andrews character gone off course, but Racette teased out layers of complexity. “Ev’ry day I pray it may be so,” Ellen sings in Act II, as she tells the doomed apprentice that Grimes appears to be making a “new start.” Racette tintured the line with pessimism and melancholy, even acid irony. Likewise, in the Act III aria “Embroidery in childhood,” she conveyed Ellen’s inner agony, the sense that by trying to save Grimes she has doomed him, all the while maintaining the neo-Baroque elegance of Britten’s vocal line.

The remainder of the cast added much human detail, even if Doyle’s staging allowed relatively little room for physical characterization. Felicity Palmer elicited some of the few laughs of the night with her pungent, sharp-elbowed incarnation of the opium- and gossip-addicted Mrs. Sedley, the one who whips the chorus into a rage. John Del Carlo exuded fatuous dignity as the lawyer Swallow. And the young New Zealander baritone Teddy Tahu

Rhodes, who has won something of an Internet following for his bare-chested outings as Don Giovanni and Billy Budd, made a major Met debut as Ned Keene, turning heads solely with his beautiful, room-filling voice.

Donald Runnicles, the conductor, drew grandiose, almost Wagnerian sounds from the orchestra, although I sometimes wished for sharper rhythmic edges and an extra tinge of ferocity. The Storm Interlude, in particular, suffered in comparison with an overwhelming concert performance that the London Symphony gave at Avery Fisher Hall four years ago, under Colin Davis’s direction. Still, Runnicles showed an instinctive understanding of Britten’s tempos and idiom; in particular, he conjured the wide-open, lonesome atmosphere that was partly missing from Doyle’s staging. If you couldn’t see Aldeburgh, you could certainly hear it.

Under the imaginative leadership of Peter Gelb, the Met has enjoyed a surge of attendance this season, with many performances selling out—good luck getting tickets for upcoming runs of “Tristan und Isolde” and “La Fille du Régiment.” But the company has had a harder time stirring interest in “Grimes,” which drew considerably less than a full house on opening night. Met audiences show inexplicable resistance to this opera: I remember the depressing sight of row upon row of empty seats when Philip Langridge gave a searing account of the title role ten years ago. Gelb has virtuosically marketed stars such as Anna Netrebko and Natalie Dessay, but the challenge with “Grimes” is to sell the work itself, to convince a cautious public of its beauty and power. It’s the same challenge Gerard Mortier will face when he begins importing thorny twentieth-century fare to City Opera next year. Perhaps ancillary events—lectures, literary readings, film showings—would make New York’s intellectual set aware that opera has more to offer than beautiful voices preening in front of sumptuous sets. When “Grimes” is broadcast on the Met’s Live in HD series, on March 15th, a national audience can see for itself that Peter Grimes’s descent into madness has the cosmic chill of the greatest scenes in Shakespeare. ♦



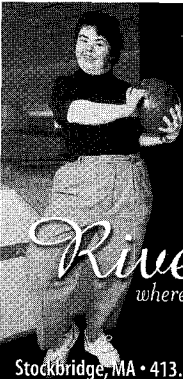
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LESSNESS

The Whitney Biennial.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

This year's Whitney Biennial, the most poetic I can remember, feels mildly unhappy and restlessly alert. If it were a sound, it would be the muttering of a cast awaiting the inexplicably delayed rise of a curtain. The show confirms impressions of a new, gray mood among younger artists, one at odds with the recent prevalence in international art of both commercial glitz and festivalist brass. Call it a decline in producer confidence. Who is making art? For whom? Why? As usual at the Biennial, few good answers are in evidence. But, for once, bad answers prove almost as elusive. The show is conventionally anti-conventional, like most of the world's biennials, in its emphasis on installations and videos and its paucity of painting in particular and of traditional mediums in general. Its strongest suit is certain types of sculpture that have flourished lately—the same assembled, shaggy varieties that dominate “Unmonumental,” the inaugural, solid show of the New Museum, downtown. Yet this Biennial is remarkably free of forced ideas, despite an occasional appeal to ecological virtue. It is full of busy ingenuities that smack of art school—but of art-school studios, not seminars. Two decades of academic postmodernizing have trailed off into embarrassed silence. One of the show's curators, Henriette Huldish, writing in the catalogue, borrows a title of Samuel Beckett's to characterize the Zeitgeist: “Lessness.” Not less is more. Less is all—get with it. (Good old Beckett, the never-fail appliance for glamorizing malaise.) I favor being encouraged. There isn't a lot in the show to like very much, but the over-all tenor puts me in mind of the “aridity” that, according to another exigent author, John of the Cross, is a key stage in the “dark night of the soul,” preceding redemption. Even if little comes of it, the drama of

this state—a sort of exasperated modesty—will etch the 2008 Biennial in memory.

“An Ideal Disjuncture,” a big sculpture by the Los Angeles artist Ruben Ochoa, is a case in point. It is made of unprepossessing stuff: jumbled slabs of cement on wooden pallets; an off-kilter cement shape, like a blasted tree trunk, sprouting naked rebar; a swooping expanse of chain-link fence. It evokes a municipal construction site subjected to an earthquake. Ochoa, born in 1974, is an artist with a socially critical bent, whose past works have included shows that travelled in his family's tortilla delivery van and murals of absent natural landscapes on freeway containing walls. But a formal impulse overqualifies “Disjuncture” for discursive purposes. A sheer and ungainly fact in the room with you, the work transposes features of banal reality—chiefly the look and feel of concrete, the ur-material of Los Angeles—into qualities to savor. Whatever it started out to mean has been waylaid by fascination. The effect is a stuttering, halfway transcendence. Imagine a stranger who has forgotten his name and importunes you, on the off chance that you know it. It is an awkward moment, but he is a pleasant stranger. Works by Charles Long are similarly befuddling: vaguely Giacometti-esque, vaguely figurative skinny sculpture in papier-mâché, plaster, and assorted debris on steel armatures, their forms derived from found patterns of bird droppings. Bizarre in the mind while lovely in the eye, they make for another odd halt, marked by mutual, cordial incomprehension. Then there's Rachel Harrison, the leading light of new sculpture, with objects and collages that combine trashy bric-a-brac, vulgar images, and slathered paint with an uncanny confidence, as if she knew precisely what she means—and

you would, too, if you were just the littlest bit smarter than you are.

The few painters in the show are well chosen and register keenly. The veteran abstractionist Mary Heilmann is famous for what may at first look to be fast, brushy messes but which hang together with the mysterious cogency of free jazz. Three new pictures that are challengingly woozy, even for her, broadcast a smiling sympathy with the show's bravely irresolute youngsters. Karen Kilimnik, with a typical installation of girlishly romantic canvases on themes of bygone European aristocracy, in a room with a pretty chandelier, offers similar reassurance, to the effect that confused feelings are a problem only if you insist on making them one. Sharply surprising is the inclusion of taciturn paintings of benumbingly ordinary suburban streets by the finest of the first-generation photo-realists, Robert Bechtle, whose style has hardly varied in more than forty years. But take their philosophical measure: a stony refusal to believe that we ever know what we see, put to a test of things—dull houses, parked cars—that seem too obvious to merit even passing attention. Like a struck tuning fork, Bechtle's skepticism finds harmonic vibrations in works by young artists of otherwise unrelated sorts. I detect something like it in Lisa Sigal's constructions of raw and painted wallboard and plaster, doors, and lighted enclosures, with irregular panels of Daniel Buren-like painted stripes. Sigal is one of several Biennial artists working with architectural elements on an architectural scale, in quizzical and anxious ways—as if asking, What is this place? Sigal has installed small, dilapidated scraps of stripe painting in the museum's stairwell, where they suggest unbidden thoughts of a worried mind.

So many melancholy characters roam the screens of the show's video projections that you're apt to contract the existential blues, too. In “Can't Swallow It, Can't Spit It Out,” by Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn, a woman in a plastic Valkyrie helmet, carrying a hunk of foam-rubber cheese and dabbing at an unexplained nosebleed, chatters compulsively while conducting the camera operator on a desultory tour of nocturnal, woebegone Los Angeles places. It's



Works on exhibit at the Whitney by (clockwise from top left) Charles Long (foreground) and Ruben Ochoa; Omer Fast; Rodney McMillian (foreground) and Olivier Mosset; and John Baldessari. Photographs by Gus Powell.

funny and alarming. Omer Fast's "The Casting" is a four-channel virtuoso exercise, in interview and live-action formats, based on an American soldier's anguished memories of dating a mad, self-mutilating woman in Germany and, worse, accidentally shooting a civilian in Iraq. The hero of Olaf Breuning's "Home 2"—which might better be titled "Global Jackass"—is a manic tourist who, upriver in Papua New Guinea, blathers about his fun encounters with native populations worldwide. We see him prevailing on polite pedestrians in Japan to pose for the camera in garish bunny masks. You want to slap him. "T.S.O.Y.W."—an abbreviation for "The Sorrows of Young Werther," Goethe's novel of tormented youth—by Amy Granat and Drew Heitzler, could stand as this Biennial's signature piece. In images shown on two screens, a lone motorcyclist interminably prowls the Southwest, stopping at odd roadside sites (a "Cowboy Church," which is closed) and at famous earthworks, including Robert Smithson's "Spiral Jetty." (An incidental beauty of the work is that

it was shot in 16-mm. film, with sensuous under- and overexposures that lend a nostalgic air of modern antiquity.) Gradually, the biker comes to seem a contemporary every soul, atingle with life that may or may not prove to have been worth living.

In the Biennial's aesthetic background—and foreground, in concurrent installations and a program of performances at the Park Avenue Armory—is a burbling, flimsy abundance of collaborative and participatory activities. At the Armory, viewers may write on strips of red flannel that will be woven into Rapunzel-like braids of artificial golden hair, make music by touching electrical wires, knock back shots of homemade tequila (at set times), lie down on cots in a jungle-style "triage" tent, and sign up for closeted psychotherapy sessions with an artist who cheerfully admits to being wholly unqualified for the job. Such stunts give me a "you had to be there" feeling, even while I'm there. But they are harmless enough, and they do reinforce a Beckettian motive of, having

nothing to do, doing something. One work enchanted me. In a darkened room, partly cluttered with personal and studio detritus, sounds are heard. They are a live feed from a microphone in a rural field in Kansas, the native state of the artist, Rashawn Griffin. It was windy out there, and there was traffic on an apparently nearby road, when I dropped by. A tremendous sense of displacement and loss, in empty distances, grew on me. I found myself listening intently, as if for something revelatory—perhaps the *vroom* of Young Werther's motorcycle, questing past in the suddenly exact middle of nowhere. ♦

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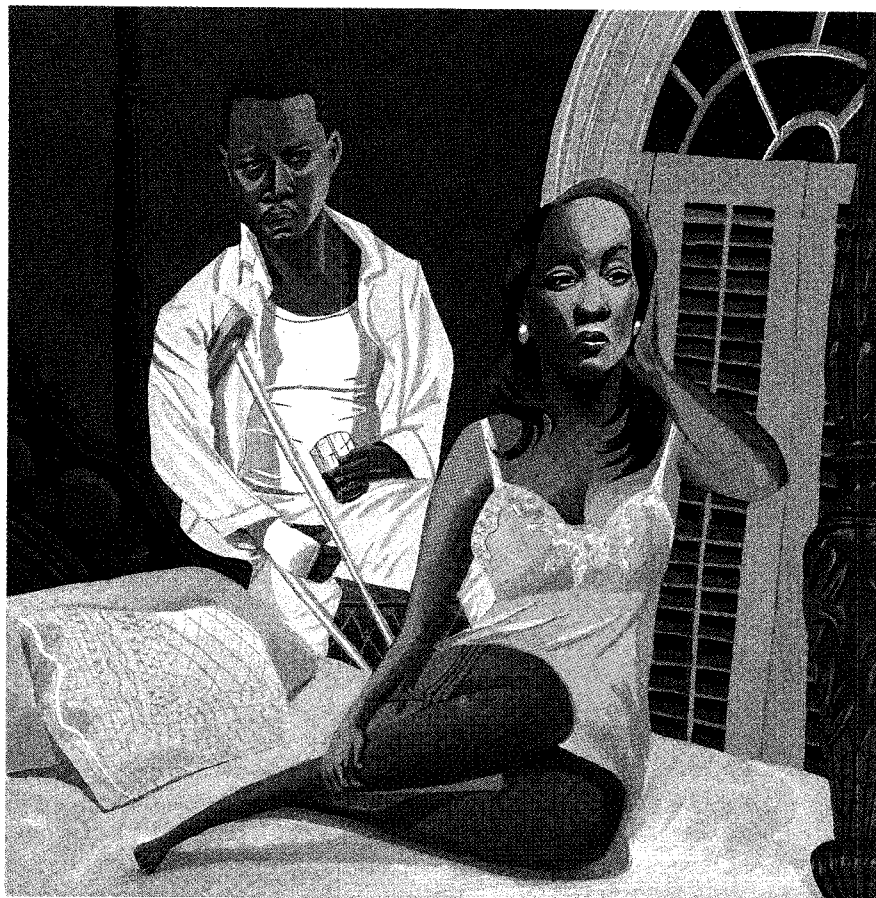
"The tests have shown that the new air-delivered ordnance is comparable to a nuclear weapon in its efficiency and capability," Col.-Gen. Alexander Rukshin, a deputy chief of the Russian military's General Staff, said in televised remarks.

Unlike a nuclear weapon, the bomb doesn't hurt the environment, he added.

LOVE AND DISASTER

"Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," "Adding Machine," "Liberty City."

BY HILTON ALS



Terrence Howard and Anika Noni Rose in Williams's Pulitzer Prize-winning play.

The real star of the latest production of "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" (at the Broadhurst, directed by Debbie Allen) is the play itself. Listening to Tennessee Williams's rare poetry, which grounds his characters' lush speech in the exaggeratedly colloquial, is made all the more delectable by his witchy, fine-fanged humor—and his compassion. The play was first produced on Broadway in 1955, and went on to win that year's Pulitzer Prize. During the show's nearly three-hour running time, one is alert less to the action—which is relatively minimal—than to the various aesthetic tightropes that Williams walks, the most obvious being his skillful balance of melodrama and artistry. At times, you can feel him reaching so high to incorporate into

his work both a spiritual and a carnal longing for love that you fear he'll topple over. But "Cat" keeps righting itself, largely because the hysteria that propels it—it's a play about painful recrimination, and lies that are reversed in the face of the brutal truth—is tempered by Williams's command of his craft. He loves the way his characters talk, but he loves their silences, too.

"Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" grew out of a short story titled "Three Players of a Summer Game," which the author published in this magazine in 1952. That story, about an adolescent boy's romantic awakening, centered on four main characters, only two of whom made it to the boards: Brick Pollitt and his wife, Margaret. In the play, Brick (Terrence

Howard, making his stage and Broadway debuts) calls his wife Maggie; she calls herself Maggie the Cat. Her feline qualities, like her self-interest, are hard to miss—she's coyly flirtatious with Brick's father, Big Daddy (James Earl Jones), the family patriarch and wealthy plantation owner, and she's skittish around Brick, who rejects her sexually. Not that Maggie (Anika Noni Rose) blames him, not much: sometime before the action begins, Maggie slept with Brick's unstable buddy, Skipper, in order to break up the close friendship between the two men and win back her husband's attentions. Now Maggie thinks it's time that she and Brick got over the affair—she wants a child, and to become a legitimate member of the Pollitt clan. But Brick can't move on. Soon after Maggie slept with Skipper, and Brick rebuffed his attempts to confess, Skipper more or less drank himself to death. Brick can't live with the guilt—or with Maggie.

Despite her relative emotional ruthlessness, Maggie's a conventional girl at heart. She loves Brick, though perhaps she loves his princelike status in the family more. Having grown up poor, Maggie wants to be the child who's got her own. It's a tricky act to pull off, and one that can all too easily expose an actress's weaknesses. On the night I saw the show, I could feel Rose's anxiety in the role immediately. She may be too young for the part, and too full of self-regard. As she stretches and cozies up to Brick like an animal circling its hoped-for owner, her movements seem too studied—one feels that her desire is annoying enough for any man to turn his back on.

Under Debbie Allen's eager-to-please direction, the women are either caricatures or shrill harridans. As Brick's doting mother, Big Mama, Phylicia Rashad (Allen's sister) is a parody of the Southern matriarch. And as Brick's sister-in-law Mae—a broad part that should be played subtly—Lisa Arrindell Anderson is merely a shouter; she's all clenched and flexed. We see her ambition, but nothing of the twisted spirit that informs it. In general, Allen seems barely interested in exploring Williams's soulfulness. Twice during the show, she has a black saxophone player walk onstage and blow a mournful tune. Why? To remind us that this is an all-black production?

MARK LUKSEN

Race plays as much or as little a role in this revival as you want it to. When the incredible Jones uses the word "nigger," to describe his boyhood self, you can feel how hard Big Daddy has worked to rise above all epithets to become himself. The smallness of life hasn't stood in Big Daddy's way, and this is one reason that Brick's resignation baffles his father, even as he reaches out to him. Jones understands Williams's language, and relaxes into it; his frame puffs up with pride and pleasure, like a peacock, as he shows off Big Daddy's charm. Howard, for his part, conveys Brick's barely repressed grief, and he beautifully channels his character's paralyzing sense of defeat. When they're together, Howard and Jones manage to transcend the play's weak direction; they tap into Williams's jazzy partial score about fathers and sons and the women who may or may not love them.

In "Adding Machine" (at the Minetta Lane), brilliance comes and goes, like a cork riding high on the sea. There is no doubting the talent of this chamber musical's young composer, Joshua Schmidt, and his co-lyricist, Jason Loewith, especially when you consider their unlikely source material: Elmer L. Rice's didactic seven-act play, "The Adding Machine."

First produced in 1923, Rice's seventh stage play—he had written a number of successful melodramas—was lauded for its Expressionistic dialogue and distinctly modern concerns: racism, loneliness, alienation. At the heart of the piece is Mr. Zero (played, in this production, by Joel Hatch)—a sweet but dim-witted and, ultimately, murderous office worker who craves respect. Entrancingly staged by the director David Cromer, the show's cold, angular sets invoke the early Expressionist works of the filmmaker King Vidor, who mined similar territory—the loss of the individual and of honor, the deadening effects of automation—in works like "The Big Parade" and "The Crowd." (Takeshi Kata, Keith Parham, and Kristine Knanishu, who are the show's outstanding scenic, lighting, and costume designers, respectively, help achieve Cromer's bleak vision.)

After a rousing start—courtesy of Cyrrilla Baer as Mrs. Zero, who opens the show with a cruel and complicated aria about her troubled marriage—the action shifts to Mr. Zero at work, where he adds

sums in a ledger. The numbers are read aloud to him in a flat, weary voice by his co-worker and occasional love interest, Daisy (the gifted Amy Warren). Daisy looks like a Madame Alexander doll that has been socked in the eye and then left out in the rain. Her heart's been bruised, too, but how to repair it? Certainly Mr. Zero can't give her the love she requires. He's too worried about the promotion he believes he deserves. And, when it doesn't come, he kills his boss, and is condemned to death. Life will not miss him.

A stellar supporting cast is backed up by an offstage group of musicians who play the score, which ranges from Gershwin-like ragtime to Weill-inspired jazz. The play's one troubling note is its main character's affect: Hatch plays Zero as Rice and the makers of this musical intended—as a blowhard with nothing to say—but his lack of presence means there's little to latch on to when he's onstage (which is most of the time). Luckily, Baer and Warren are compelling enough to fill the void that Mr. Zero leaves in his wake. They are the performers you most want to watch, and their collective magic illuminates what is clearly at work behind this production: a desire to make remarkable theatre.

"Liberty City" (at New York Theatre Workshop) is a one-woman show starring a very appealing actress named April Yvette Thompson. The ninety-minute piece is based on her life—first as a child, and then as a young woman growing up in Liberty City, a part of Miami that is home to many people of the Caribbean diaspora. Co-written and directed by Jessica Blank, the show has a lot of pep, and a few too many stock characters. Thompson could inhabit her characters with greater physical ease; she is too tentative all around, but especially when it comes to embodying her revolution-minded dad, or her sympathetic and tolerant mother. She stands outside these characters, shyly, and like a little girl—but she's a grownup now, and an actress, so she should tell us about the citizens of her world with more physical expression. Nonetheless, Thompson's storytelling skills are solid and endearing, and she manages what "Cat"'s Anika Noni Rose does not: she telegraphs, truthfully, her awkwardness and uncertainty, which ultimately win us over. ♦

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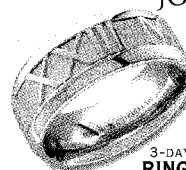
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THE DIVIDER

In an HBO miniseries, John Adams is the indispensable man.

BY JILL LEPORE

The history of our Revolution will be one continued lie from one end to the other," John Adams grumbled, in 1790, when Benjamin Franklin was on his deathbed. "The essence of the whole will be that Dr. Franklin's electrical rod smote the earth and out sprang General Washington." The neglect of posterity was a prospect that Adams could not abide. And now he doesn't have to. HBO's seven-part miniseries "John Adams," which premieres on March 16th, tells Adams's tale, with Paul Giamatti in the title role, scowling beneath fifty-seven different wigs. "He United the States of America" is the miniseries' motto, giving credit to Adams for... everything. Franklin (Tom Wilkinson) is a rascal; Washington (David Morse) is a sapskull. Jefferson (Stephen Dillane) is distracted and, finally, deluded. And poor Thomas Paine seems never to have been born. Based on David McCullough's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography, "John Adams" is animated as much by Adams's many private resentments as by the birth of the United States. It is history, with a grudge.

One night in 1759, when Adams was twenty-four, and just starting out, he woke up, seized with an aching void in his chest. He picked up his quill, reached for his ink pot, and wrote in his diary, "I feel anxious, eager, after something. What is it?" It was the same thing it always was: the pain of insatiable ambition. "I have a dread of Contempt, a quick sense of Neglect, a strong Desire of Distinction," Adams wrote that night. Say what you will about the man who became our second President, he knew himself well. Giamatti's finely crafted John Adams is a little easier to take—he's the Ebenezer Scrooge of the American Revolution, slouchy, grouchy, and crusty, but mushy on the inside.

"John Adams" begins with the Boston Massacre, on March 5, 1770. By the dim light of a quarter moon, eight British grenadiers have fired into a crowd

of Bostonians rioting on King Street. Adams, in a daze, stumbles over the bodies of the dead and the wounded, and trudges home through the blood-stained snow, speechless at the agony of what he has witnessed. "I have no words for it, Abigail," he whispers to his wife (exquisitely played by Laura Linney).

Abigail, wise, fierce, and long-suffering, is Adams's anchor, the brake on his pride, his most astute adviser. After the British soldiers are charged with murder, Adams agrees to defend them in court, defying his fellow Sons of Liberty, including his rabble-rousing cousin, Samuel Adams (Danny Huston), who wants nothing more than for the redcoats to hang. The night before he is to deliver his summary to the jury, Adams, in his nightshirt, paces the floor of his bedchamber, while Abigail, tucked beneath the covers, reads a draft of his statement. Impatient for her critique, he opens and closes the bed curtains, a scene that's a nice play on the eighteenth-century phrase "curtain lecture" (a shrewish version of what we mean by "pillow talk"). "Vanity. You have overburdened your argument with ostentatious erudition," Abigail observes, steering her husband, as always, onto a better course.

We then follow Adams to Philadelphia, where he serves as a Massachusetts delegate to the First Continental Congress. In the wake of Parliament's passage of the Coercive Acts (which included a measure closing Boston Harbor to trade), Adams is tireless but unable to persuade delegates from the other colonies to support a struggle that, so far, looks to be Boston's fight. He heads home, defeated. But on April 19, 1775, just before Adams is to travel back to Philadelphia for the Congress's second meeting, shots are fired in Lexington and Concord. From his farm south of Boston, Adams races to the scene and rides through the bloody fields, once again picking a path over the

dead and the wounded. "There can be no mistaking Britain's intentions now," he tells Abigail.

Back in Philadelphia for the Second Continental Congress, Adams ardently argues for declaring independence. Imagine an animated version of John Trumbull's famous painting of the signing of the Declaration of Independence—the image engraved on the back of the two-dollar bill—and you've got a pretty good idea of the scene. Independence, this miniseries would have you believe, was almost entirely Adams's doing. As history, and maybe even as television, this is a hard argument to make, because although Adams presented the case to Congress, it was Thomas Paine who convinced the American people to support independence and Thomas Jefferson who wrote the document declaring it. "I am obnoxious, suspected, and unpopular," Giamatti's Adams tells Jefferson—a line taken from one of Adams's letters, like much of the dialogue—graciously ceding the task of drafting the Declaration of Independence to the Virginian. Adams forever regretted this. "Jefferson ran away with all the stage effect," he complained, "and all the glory."

There is much that is wonderful in "John Adams," which was produced by Tom Hanks and Gary Goetzman, who also launched HBO's 2001 miniseries "Band of Brothers." Giamatti and Linney brilliantly portray the tenderness, loneliness, and passionate understanding that marked John and Abigail's half century of marriage. Eighteenth-century Boston, and much else besides, is beautifully realized: lush and bustling, with ships' masts looming and halyards clanking. If there's a film that better captures the look of Colonial America, I haven't seen it. For Revolution junkies, spotting the cameos makes an awfully good parlor game. (My favorite: Henry Knox, riding by Abigail's house on his horse, on his way to Dorchester Heights to blast the British out of Boston. Joseph Warren rides by, too, after the Battle of Bunker Hill, except that he's dead, and on an oxcart, so a bit of a disappointment, really.) There's very little of the war itself—Adams was no soldier—but, perhaps as a solace, there's plenty of bloodletting, not to mention amputation. (A word to the squeamish: it goes badly.) Actually, the inoculation of Abigail and the Adams

children against smallpox—more blood; also pus—is nearly the most terrifying scene in the four episodes made available to reviewers. It's second only to the tarring and feathering of a British customs official in Boston, the brutality of which Adams watches with horror, in a masterly sequence that exposes the violence of insurrection and helps explain the future President's enduring fear of democracy.

At its best, the storytelling manages to accommodate a sense of historical contingency. American independence was not inevitable. It was debated. It didn't happen overnight. No one was sure how it would turn out. Adams's jaundiced view allows for this insight, too: war is a mess, and only ever glorious in hindsight. Finally, there's something almost ineffably moving about watching the debates of the Second Continental Congress, where Adams truly shone.

There are, of course, little things that irk. Everyone is far too frank with everyone else (the eighteenth century was nothing if not coy), and this viewer happens to wish that the Pennsylvania delegate and eloquent opponent of independence, John Dickinson (Željko Ivanek), hadn't been made into a Quaker Cruella De Vil, a distortion necessary, I suppose, to make Adams appear more stalwart. But the bigger problem is how far the writing has to go to make Adams both more important and more virtuous than everyone around him except his wife, as if to justify his prodigious self-regard and disdain for his contemporaries. Adams didn't "unite the states of America," but he accomplished a hell of a lot. He was bold. He was brilliant. That doesn't mean he wasn't also a heel.

SEYMOUR CHWAST

After Adams's devastating failure, in the election of 1800, to win a second Presidential term, he spent much of the rest of his life worrying about how history would treat him.

In 1807, he read Mercy Otis Warren's three-volume "History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution," a twelve-hundred-page book that devoted a scant four pages to the character of one John Adams. He fell into a rage. Adams wrote Warren ten letters—some more than twenty pages long—

doubt, this is 'sighing for rank,' he sneered, anticipating her objection. "Very well: say so, Mrs. Warren. Make the most of it."

Adams had a right to feel betrayed: for decades, Mercy and Abigail had been close friends. But his reading of Warren's "History" was paranoid and hysterical, and his letters to her are the rantings of a bully: she is unladylike; there are things he could say about her if he weren't such a gentleman; and she could not possibly be motivated by anything but bitterness at his having been unwilling to grant members of her family political preferment. Adams is by no means the hero of Warren's "History," but neither is anyone else; it's an epic history of an age, not a profile of its leading figures. And though Warren may have resented Adams, she, along with other Americans who had only recently seen him voted out of office, also felt quite certain that he suffered from "pride of talents" and a love of power.

Mercy Warren had a response to Adams's abuse. "Were she to write her History over again, and correct her errors, as you seem to wish her to do," she answered, what must she

write? Adams would obviously be contented only if she told the world that he was free of ambition and vainglory, and that his writings "established the State and Federal Constitutions, and gave the United States all the liberty, republicanism, and independence they enjoy; that his name was always placed at the head of every public commission; that nothing had been done, that nothing could be done, neither in Europe nor America, without his sketching and drafting the business." Who would believe such silliness? "Mr. Adams might indeed think this a very pleasant portrait, but I doubt whether the world would receive it as a better likeness." Ah, just give it time, Mrs. Warren. Give it time. ♦



Early in life, Adams owned up to "a strong Desire of Distinction."

of petty, rambling vituperation. Warren had assailed his temperament: "In the 392d page of the third volume, you say that 'Mr. Adams, his passions and prejudices were sometimes too strong for his sagacity and judgment.'" She had neglected him: "You have carefully recorded the appointment of Mr. Jay to Madrid, in page 141, Vol. II, to have been on the 27th of September, 1779, yet have taken no notice of mine, which was on the 29th of the same month." She would not even grant him alphabetic preëminence. When Warren listed Franklin, Jay, and Adams as ambassadors, Adams complained that his name ought to have appeared first in that list, as it had in their commission. "You will say, no

RECURRING NIGHTMARE

"Funny Games."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Be warned. Sitting down to watch the new Michael Haneke movie, "Funny Games," may induce a chronic attack of déjà vu, and no wonder. This is a scene-for-scene remake of an *old* Michael Haneke movie, also called "Funny Games," released here a decade ago. Apart from the continental shift, with America taking on a role previously played by Austria, the two films should be treated as a pair of identical, staring twins. This isn't like Hitchcock having another crack at "The Man Who Knew Too Much," as he did after an interval of twenty-two years, and conjuring a very different result; it isn't even like Gus Van Sant reheating "Psycho" in color, as he did in 1998; it's like Hitchcock himself shooting "Psycho" all over again, in 1970, somewhere off an Autobahn outside Graz.

And so, like shackled prisoners trudging back to the rack and the thumbscrews, we start once more, with an overhead view of a family car pulling a boat on a trailer along rural roads. The family comprises George (Tim Roth), Ann (Naomi Watts), their ten-year-old son, Georgie (Devon Gearhart), and their dog—a lolloping golden retriever named Lucky. If there is one lesson we learn from "Funny Games," it is not that malice is rooted deep in our soiled nature, or that capitalist society has made an unhealthy fetish of violence, but simply that, if you want to avoid such unpleasantness, ditch the retriever. Everything that happens to George and Ann could have been avoided with a pair of Dobermans, or an underfed Scottish terrier with a working knowledge of Nietzsche.

George and Ann have a place in the country, on the water, with other desirable residences at a discreet remove. They wave at a set of neighbors as they drive by, but the neighbors seem distracted, busy with a couple of guests. Later, when Ann is in the kitchen, one of those guests, Peter (Brady Corbet), drops in to borrow some eggs. I remember the

egg sequence all too well from the earlier "Funny Games"; in a sense, it is the most disturbing scene in the movie, with Peter asking politely, then not so politely, then dropping the eggs and wanting more. The very ordinariness of these moments, and the indefinable point at which they crack and spill into something out of the ordinary, and thence into threat, are a

sign of bourgeois weakness in the world of Haneke—and then ask Paul and Peter to leave. But the young men linger and exasperate, earning a slap on the face from George, at which point, with one retaliatory swing of a golf club, the movie lands in the rough. From here we progress to heavy teasing, torture, homicide, and the spectacle of evil raising its game.

Haneke is obsessed by that spectacle, and by the helpless reflex that compels us to keep watching, even as we cringe at what we see. When the first "Funny Games" came out, in 1997, it felt like a furious rejoinder to "Reservoir Dogs" (1992) and the rest of the pack—to the insistence, among Tarantino and his ilk, on bloodshed as an amusing spectator sport. Where Aristotle's theory of tragedy



Naomi Watts, Tim Roth, and Michael Pitt in Michael Haneke's remake.

horribly deft introduction to the Haneke method. The rest of the movie is infinitely nastier, yet how much does it truly add to this initial fumble of disquiet?

Peter is soon joined by Paul (Michael Pitt). I was half-expecting a homicidal Mary, just to complete the set, but no joy. Peter and Paul are clad in white, with long shorts and matching gloves: angels with dirty morals, perhaps, or ghostly sports ejected long ago from one of Gatsby's parties, who have prowled the shoreline ever since in search of trouble. (Pitt, especially, makes a cherubic, cherry-lipped villain, to add to his randy innocent in "The Dreamers" and his stoned Kurt Cobain look-alike in "Last Days.") George and Ann try at first to be helpful—always

had relied on catharsis (the climactic purging and mastery of our terror, as we witness overpowering deeds), Haneke seemed to suggest that recent cinema has cheapened such slaking of emotion into a near-pornographic fake: we are crazed and cheered by shuddering events that have no authentic claim upon our feelings. His solution, in "Funny Games," was to teach us a lesson by refusing to offer any such arousal. One problem, however, was that the film itself inched close to the sort of exploitative detail that it was supposed to abhor—a proximity that only gets worse in this later version, which adds a definite carnal kick to the sight of the heroine being forced to strip to her underwear. Beyond this, how-

ANDY FRIEDMAN

ever, the new movie wears an air of old hat. I would absolutely defend Haneke's right to relaunch his broadside on our voyeuristic vices, but he's not keeping up with the times; he's behind them. Take the musical outrage in the opening credits—a howl of thrash metal, interrupting the operatic arias that Ann and George have been listening to in the car. The fact is that the George of 2008 would have a bundle of thrash on his iPod, all shuffled up with his Verdi. The howl is now mainstream, and every horror movie comes equipped with a built-in snigger, as if it had stolen Haneke's warning and made it part of the scenery: when the makers of "Saw" and "Hostel" set to work on their sequels, they are not merely cashing in on a commercial hit but prodding a craven audience with the possibility that the slaughters depicted onscreen may never reach their natural, cathartic end.

The stuff that works in "Funny Games" was always efficient. There is still a dazzling deflection of suspense, as a stray knife is glimpsed in closeup and thus prepared as a possible tool of revenge; we even see Ann eyeing it, and we find ourselves willing her to wield it, but Peter sees it, too, and brushes it away. Better that than the infamous scene in which one of the maleficients, after a gunshot, suddenly grabs a remote control and pauses the film that we ourselves are watching, as we might do with a video. He rewinds quickly, then stops and plays the scene again, with the gunshot removed and the plot thereby diverted; this is meat and drink to anyone writing a Ph.D. thesis entitled "Viewing and (Re)viewing: Discourses of Dread in Austro-American Cinema," but onscreen

it's curiously clunky and flat, and, when you consider the implications, it is Haneke who is shooting himself in the foot. If this movie knows it's merely a movie, and concedes as much, why should we honor its mayhem with any genuine fright? When Michael Pitt turns to the camera and asks, with a smile, "You really think it's enough?" or "You want a proper ending, don't you?" we don't feel nearly as chastened or ashamed as Haneke would like. We feel patronized, which is one of the worst moods that can beset an audience. Would "Psycho" have been a more profound film if Norman Bates had turned off the shower halfway through, adjusted his dress, and said to us, "Don't worry about the blood. It's chocolate sauce"? That movie was, in its way, no less self-conscious than "Funny Games"—the murder of Marion Crane clearly brandished its own artistry, with Norman's knife rivalled, chop for chop, by the editor's cuts—yet it still maintained its duty to move and terrify. Aristotle would have been hiding under his seat.

When Haneke delivered "Funny Games," it stirred fear and loathing in some viewers; the contempt, you might say, was mutual, and it seems odd for the director to revisit the scene of the crime—there is something jejune, even juvenile, about the snarl and arrogance of its conceit, even though he was already in his mid-fifties when he made the film. Only in 2000 did he embark on his strongest work—on "Code Unknown," "The Piano Teacher," "The Time of the Wolf," and "Caché," made within a five-year period, and possessed of a maturity and an implacable poise that leave "Funny Games" looking as inconsequential as its

title suggests. So, of all his movies, why on earth remake that one? Why not transplant the wonderful "Code Unknown," with its jabbing questions about multicultural anxiety, to Los Angeles or New York? How about shifting "Caché," a tale of surveillance gone sour, to London, a city now infested with closed-circuit TV cameras? Both of those films are, if not outright masterpieces, at least in complete control of their tense and writhing themes, and I long for Haneke to cast his cold eye on the nervous impulses of the English-speaking nations. There is a shard of the punishing Teutonic fairy tale in everything he dreams up, and, if he puts the error of this latest film behind him, he could yet become the Grimm of the gated community, the chat room, and the gun club.

Only one thing stands in his way: the species known as the American male. Haneke's best films revolve around the figure of a woman, either resourceful or remorseless—Juliette Binoche in "Code Unknown," Isabelle Huppert as the sexual fanatic in "The Piano Teacher," and now Naomi Watts in "Funny Games." Whereas poor Tim Roth, who began his rise to fame as a blade-faced British skinhead, has been reduced by "Funny Games" to a fusspot—pathetically trying to blow his wet cell phone back to life with a hair dryer, in order to call the outside world. If Michael Haneke really wants to export his brand of panic to the United States, where it incontestably belongs, he's going to need some leading men. But who will be brave enough to contact George Clooney, or Denzel Washington, and propose them for the role of a wuss? ♦

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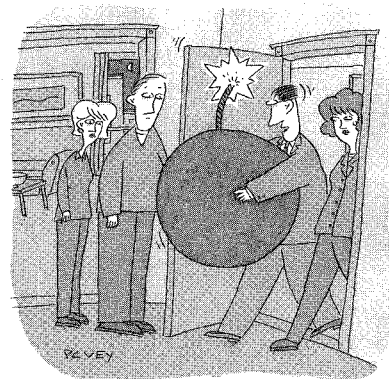
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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Gahan Wilson, must be received by Sunday, March 16th. Finalists in the March 3rd contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the March 31st issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



THE FINALISTS

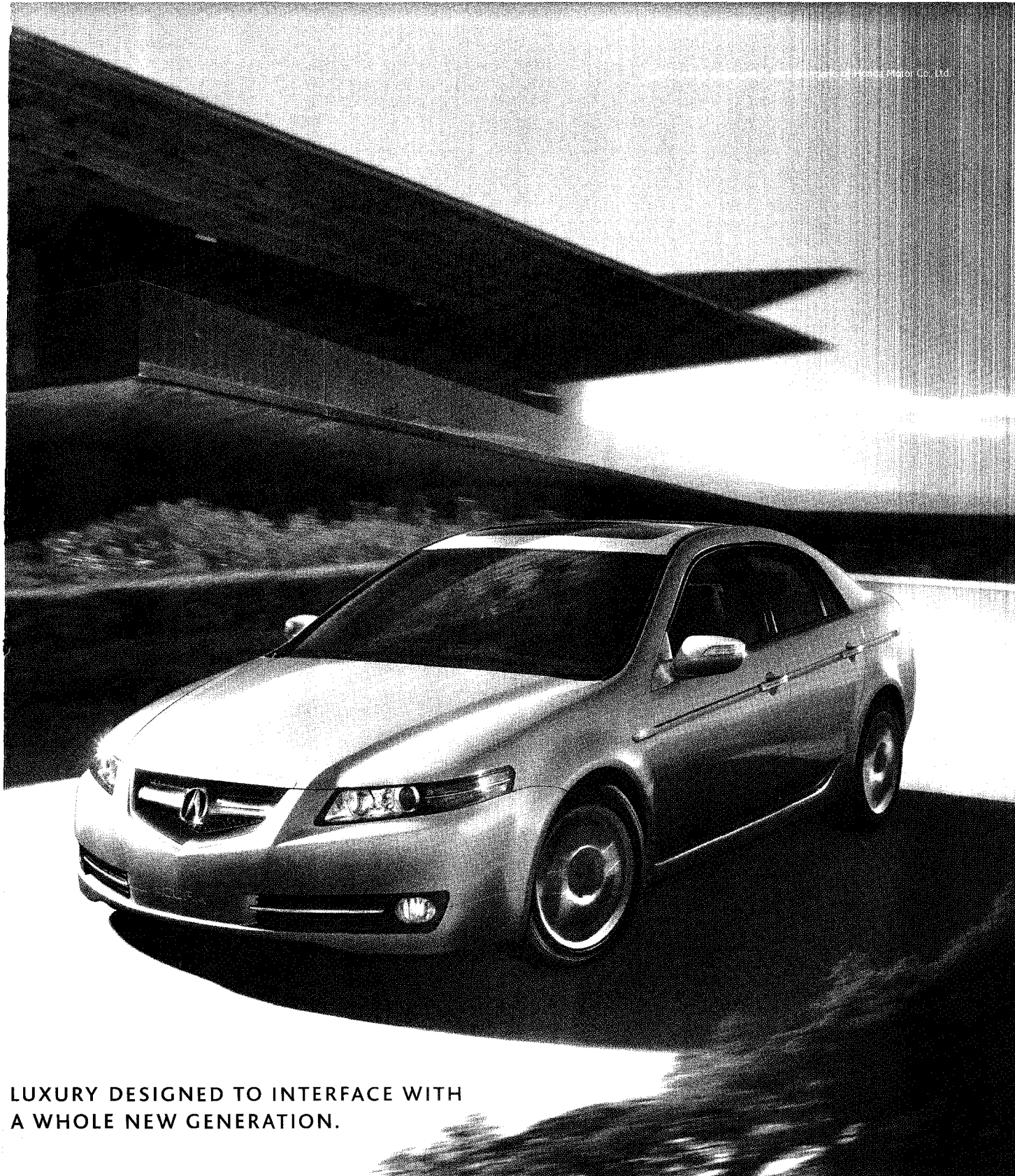
"You said B.Y.O.B., right?"
Andrew Norman, Hinsdale, Ill.

"It's great to see you, but we can only stay about fifteen seconds."
Stefan Martula, Houston, Texas

"Sorry we're late. Clearing customs was a nightmare."
Vikas Sharma, Washington, D.C.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST





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